

Title: Ginny Returns

Rating: PG-13

Category: A/U, Action/Adventure, Drama

Summary: What if the war was over, but the only ones left were Ginny and a paralyzed friend? When Ginny finds a ritual that will send her back to an earlier point in the timeline, how will she change things to come out for the better?

Important Paring: HP/GW (for those that care)

Version: 1.0 - Original

((A/N: Yes, it's a "redo" fic. I only do it because I've never seen an "only Ginny goes back" one. This is told mostly from Ginny's PoV and it is a "strong Ginny" story.

While this story is mostly book7 compliant (in magical facts), like many of my other stories, I do leave out parts I don't like or even rearrange events in time to suit my whim. Please note the "A/U" flag on the story.

As I started writing this story, in addition to the above, I ended up with 2 other goals to stretch myself as a writer (besides making Ginny be the one to go back). Feel free to guess them in reviews if you wish. One will happen by the middle of the story, and the other can't be said for certain until the end, although it may become obvious before then.

This story is mostly written, or at least thru first draft, as I post this first chapter. I only have a few chapters at the end left to go. It appears the story will hit about 100K words and will be around 15 chapters, plus or minus a few. The story also seems to want medium sized chapters for some reason.

I also want to take a moment to publically thank Wolfs_Scream for being my beta on this story. Beside helping the story look and read better, he also asks good questions to keep me on my toes. :-)
Thanks David!

I hope you enjoy the story. -- kb))

Ginny Returns

Chapter 1 – Devastation

A barely twenty-one year old Ginny threw her quill down before she angrily shoved herself from the table so she could pace. She was tired of living in this cave, although she had to admit that it was probably the nicest cave in existence. Of course, it should be since some of the best Charm and Transfiguration masters had lived here over the last five years. It was beautiful in its own rugged way and had almost every convenience you could want in a cave, including a small waterfall of pure water at the back and many plots of rich soil with an artificial light source for growing plants for food and for potions, so they always grew. It was also securely hidden from the world; Harry had insisted on making her the Secret Keeper so everyone would protect her.

She was tired of making lists of things that needed to be done to stay alive, but she had to because her only human companion lived by lists and could not make them herself because she was a quadriplegic and needed help to do almost everything. Fortunately, they had a house-elf named Winky that helped. The two were not enough to make her want to live here, although she really had no where else to go.

No, what she needed was her husband, Harry Potter. They had finally married a little less than a year ago. For the longest time, they had said that when the war was over, they would wed and start a family. But the war against Voldemort, which had started in earnest as her sixth year at Hogwarts was beginning, had continued to go badly. So they had decided not to wait on the marriage, although the children would have to wait as they needed every fighter they could get. Ginny could not afford to be pregnant. If she had a son in her arms now, she might have different feelings about her present life, but she was the only Potter left.

The war had been down to Harry and his followers, basically whomever he could get, as the Ministry had fallen over three years ago and anarchy reigned in the Wizarding World in Britain. Voldemort had mostly left the Muggle world alone, as he wanted to subdue the Wizarding world first, so most of the Muggles in England went on with

their lives never knowing about “the other world” and its war. Unfortunately for the freedom fighters, the rest of the Wizarding communities had gone on with their lives too. Their “help” had been to interdict England magically to keep the conflict there. That had helped to prevent Voldemort from getting more foot soldiers, but it had also prevented help for their side too.

Nevertheless, two weeks ago, Harry had seen a chance and taken it. In a battle to end all battles, he had committed all of his forces against all of the forces of Voldemort. All the Horcruxes destroyed, Harry had deemed it a worthwhile risk. In the end, the two leaders had killed each other and the only ones standing on the battlefield were Ginny and a few Muggle werewolves. After Ginny had ignited one of them in a fireball, the other two had turned and ran.

Ginny spent what seemed like a long time grieving over Harry’s body. Eventually, her sobs slowed down enough that she heard a voice. Searching, she found one of her oldest friends was still alive, although gravely wounded and near death. Ginny quickly took her back to their cave and did her best to heal her, which was very little given how extensive the injuries were. Another hour searching the gruesome battlefield netted only three other survivors. A Cutting curse across the necks of the three Death Eaters changed that. All of the dead, except for Harry, were piled onto a funeral pyre. Once lit, she left to bury Harry and then return to her cave.

“Ginny?” The call brought her out of her memories and her pacing.

Walking into the next room, Ginny looked at her friend. “Yes, Hermione?”

“Ginny? Can you help me sit up so I can see you better? Winky is tending the plants right now.”

Looking at her friend and the condition she was in added just that much more to her anger and frustration. Hermione had taken a Cutting curse to the back of the neck, cast by a Death Eater she never saw. It was just another thing wrong with the present world. “Sure.” Ginny pulled out her wand and helped her friend sit up.

“Thanks.”

Ginny nodded and sat down. She knew the look her friend was giving her, and it meant they were in for a long talk.

“Ginny, we need to figure out what we’re going to do. The war is over, I don’t think I’m going to get any better, and you can’t stay here forever.”

“Yes, you don’t know that, and why not?” the redhead bitinglly answered the three statements.

Hermione looked as if she had been slapped. “Ginny?!”

“What, Hermione? Aren’t I allowed to be angry? Aren’t I allowed some time to hate the world after everything I’ve been through? Yeah, your life is a bitch right now and I’m truly sorry for what’s happened to you; but my life is a mess too!” Ginny practically willed herself not to cry.

Hermione looked at her seething friend and sighed. “All right, what’s wrong? I could tell you’ve been holding things in. I’ve been expecting you to let it out, but why now and why against me?”

Ginny sat there for a moment thinking. “I don’t know. I’m just angry. I – I miss him so...” Her voice trailed off as she started to cry. She was so angry at the world. Not only could she not have her Harry, but she could not even have the simple things, like a shoulder to cry on and arms to hold her. She hung her head with her hands over her face as the tears of anger and frustration finally came.

After a few minutes, Ginny sniffled a little and looked up. Hermione was still patiently watching her and waiting. “What?”

“I know it’s not enough, but I’m sorry, Ginny,” her friend calmly told her. “I miss my friend too.”

“I wish that I had died with him, not surviving while I tried to protect his back. We were supposed to live happily every after with children and everything,” Ginny said sullenly as she wiped her eyes with the

back of her hands. "I don't even have any family left, not a single Weasley." Ginny looked at her friend, "Except for you, and you can't be happy about all of this either. You can't even read a book on your own." She cringed as she realized what she had said. "I'm sorry, Hermione," she said contritely, "that was uncalled for."

"That's all right, Ginny. It's not like I haven't thought it or that it's untrue." Hermione sighed. "We still need to figure out what we're going to do."

"How about fix it all so Harry and everyone lives while Riddle and his ilk don't?" Ginny suggested, somewhat desperately she thought.

Hermione snorted. "Right, nice idea, but I don't think it can be done."

Ginny looked at her and thought for a moment. "Why not?" she finally asked as a memory came to her. "You've done it."

"Excuse me? What are you talking about?"

"Don't be dense. You did it multiple times in your third year. Once you even helped to save Harry's and Sirius's life," Ginny reminded her.

Hermione looked at her intently for a few seconds before she rolled her eyes. "Time Turners don't count, and besides, there are laws of the universe preventing what you're talking about."

"Explain." Ginny waited, but she made it obvious she would have an answer.

"As you know," Hermione started in a tone that implied Ginny should know the answer, "Time Turners have a limited range of up to twenty-four hours, and you'd need to go back weeks at the minimum and preferably years."

"But why can't a Time Turner be made to go back that far?"

Hermione sighed. "It would take too much power, or so I think. I don't know how to make one anyway, so it doesn't matter."

“Just because you don’t know how doesn’t mean it can’t be done,” Ginny countered. “Look what’s around us.” She waved her hand around the room.

Their “cave” was really a system of caves. It had many smaller “rooms” which had been used for bedrooms, storage rooms, bathrooms, labs, and so forth, but the biggest room of the cave was the library and where Hermione lived now that it was just the two of them. They were surrounded by many bookshelves holding tens of thousands of books. In fact, there were so many, they had to be stored on the shelves in a shrunken form, then enlarged back to their normal size to be read.

Early in the war, they had found out that Hogwarts was about to be attacked. Desperate for the information in the library not to fall into the hands of Voldemort and his army, Professor McGonagall had ordered the house-elves to pack the library away and move it to number 12 Grimmauld Place. Not long afterwards, Harry had led a raid on the Malfoys and after the skirmish had ended, with the Malfoys unfortunately escaping, Hermione had realized what a treasure was in front of them. It had not been hard to convince Harry to take the Malfoy library with them before they burnt the place to the ground. That started the trend of attacking the Death Eater families to increase what was to become “the cave library”. They had learned a lot about what the Dark Arts could do and how to combat it.

“You’re ignoring the most important thing, Ginny. Remember I said that it was against the laws of the universe? You can’t change what has already happened. That would create a paradox in time and the universe doesn’t allow that to happen,” Hermione argued.

“As I understand the story, you and Harry went back three hours in time not knowing what had happened everywhere, including how Harry and Sirius were saved from the Dementors, how Sirius escaped, and probably other things. Yet, you went back anyway. Can you prove you didn’t change anything?”

“Of course not,” Hermione said slightly testily. “You can’t prove a negative. But we were very careful not to let ourselves be seen or to interfere with anything.”

"But you really don't know, AND," Ginny did her best to stop Hermione from interrupting her, "I'm not talking about using a Time Turner anyway, so your arguments don't count."

Hermione looked a little fearful. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't plan to have two of me exist, Hermione. I want to change the – timeline, so we get a different outcome. If I'm successful, then all of this, including your injury, will never happen. The good guys will win easily and the bad guys will lose early before they can do any real damage. Tom Riddle should have died in 1981. I want to correct what never should have happened."

Hermione snorted again. "Right," she drawled. "Sorry to burst your bubble, but I don't think it works that way."

"Then how does it work?" Ginny challenged her friend.

"Time only goes one way. What is done -- is done," Hermione said with a verbal shrug.

"I don't believe it, because if that was so, then Time Turners couldn't exist."

"That's well argued," Hermione admitted, "but your idea won't work. Besides, what would you change anyway? What shouldn't have happened?"

"I think the big flaw in the war was that Dumbledore held too much information too tightly. If people had known what was really going on sooner, other things could have been done that would have had a great impact to either preventing the war or else in ending it more quickly," Ginny stated as if it should have been obvious.

Hermione thought about that for several minutes and Ginny let her. "All right," Hermione finally said, "let's say you're right, just for the sake of argument, you understand, as I still believe you can't go back." Ginny nodded. "To when do you go? What's the first event you change?"

Ginny smiled, she was slowly winning the argument, and against Hermione, that was quite a feat. "I'd like to go back and prevent Harry's parents from dying, or even all the way back to when Riddle was in school and kill him before he made his first Horcrux." Ginny shuddered at the evilness of creating an artifact that split your soul to prevent yourself from dying, the horror worsened as it required murder to create one. "I don't think I can do that though, as I wouldn't have been born, so it will have to be to a time after I was born."

"So, you're saying that there won't be two of you alive at the same time, like there is with a Time-Turner?"

"Correct," Ginny replied. "I need to send my knowledge back, and I suspect that will require sending my magical essence back, as that will allow me to get around the power requirement you mentioned with Time-Turners."

Hermione considered that. "In theory, I agree. I don't think knowledge by itself can be passed backwards, although I suppose it could be argued that's what a prophecy is. Hmm, I think that knowledge will have to be attached to something that's hard to destroy and that is uniquely you."

Both girls thought about that. After a couple of minutes, Ginny cast a summoning spell and the library's index book came flying to her. She caught it and then started searching for an entry.

"What are you searching for?" Hermione asked.

"Books on soul magic. If that could keep Riddle alive, I don't see why it won't help me with what I need." Ginny kept looking.

"I don't think you'll find it, but I guess it does give you something to do for a while," Hermione said as she watched her friend. "Winky?"

The elf popped in. "Yes, Mistress Hermione?"

Hermione sighed. She had been unable to stop the Mistress nonsense. "When you come to a good stopping place with what

you're doing, I think dinner will be appropriate. I don't believe Ginny will be stopping her project anytime soon."

"Yes, Mistress Hermione. I shall have it ready in a few minutes." The little elf popped out and the room was quiet again, except for Ginny turning pages.

"Accio Soul Magic Rituals." The miniature book flew to Ginny's hand.

Hermione shook her head. After Winky helped to feed her and change her waste bag, she would ask the elf to pull a book for her and cast an Auto-Read charm on it. The little elf had demonstrated the elven spell shortly after Hermione had awakened after her injury. It caused the book to float in front of her face and turn a page every two minutes. It was slower than Hermione normally read, but at least this allowed her to still read. She did not think Ginny would find anything to help her, but it did not hurt to look. After all, there might be a way and you never know when you would find something useful. Hermione had lost track of the number of times she been searching for one thing, and found some other nugget of information that had saved someone later.

Two days later, after searching through over a dozen books, Ginny shouted, "I found it!"

Hermione looked over at her and raised one eyebrow.

"And you'll never guess where I found it." Ginny laughed before she went on, noticing that her friend just waited on her. "It was in a book from the Malfoy library. There's a ritual that will send a soul back in time. The math for the potion formula that determines the amount of time is really complex, but I think the two of us can figure it out." Ginny was all grins.

"So, you're betting everything on the fact your knowledge and uniqueness is attached to your soul?" Hermione calmly asked.

“Yes,” Ginny excitedly answered. “Let’s see here. There are some pretty rare ingredients required, but I’d swear I’ve seen them all in our potions lab. Ha! It even needs ground basilisk hide. I told Harry it would be useful to go back and harvest that monster under the school. Hmm, I don’t remember about the manticores stinger. I better go check on that one.”

“Ginny, would you please bring the book over here while you go check on that?”

“Oh, sure Hermione.” The redhead put the book in front of her friend and spelled it to stay there while she went off to check for ingredients. In the lab storeroom, she looked around all the shelves, neatly organized. It would have been a dream for someone like Severus Snape. The thought of the traitor and how he had betrayed them at the last minute dampened her excitement. With determination to right as many wrongs as possible, Ginny started grabbing phials and jars to put onto a tray to take back. As she reached the end of her list, she noted that she was missing only one ingredient, but she was not too worried. She would personally and happily supply that ingredient in order to make this work.

She took the tray to a worktable in the potions lab. Searching, she found a portable heating pit and brought it over near the worktable. It was basically a large fireproof box with six inch sides. That in place, she next looked around for their largest cauldron, a number fifteen. It was over in the corner. The cauldron was set on top of the heating pit. There was no need to light it now, as they needed to work out the potion formula for the ritual. A small part of her wondered how similar this was to what Wormtail did to bring Tom back during Harry’s fourth year.

That prep work done, Ginny felt a lot better about solving all of their problems and returned to the library and Hermione. For the first time in over two weeks, she even felt a twinge of hope. The first thing she noticed was that Hermione looked somewhat pale and ill. “Hermione? Are you OK?” Ginny immediately pulled out her wand and did a medical diagnostic on her friend, but nothing new turned up.

“Ginny,” her friend hoarsely whispered, “did you read all of this?”

“Well, most of it. I read the description of what the ritual can do, the ingredients for the ritual’s potion, and then I skimmed the discussion of the ritual. Why?” Ginny still did not understand the problem.

“All right,” Hermione drawled. “Let’s start with the overview. If this actually works, it will send ‘you’, however that’s really defined, back in time. The book defines you as your soul. It says nothing about knowledge or magic or anything else. So you might just go back in time and relive the very same life over again.”

“Hardly,” Ginny argued. “We already agreed that knowledge must be attached to something permanent. So when my soul is sent back, my knowledge will go too. It’s possible my magic will go back as well, which would give me a nice magical boost, but I really don’t think that will happen. After all, a person can lose their magic and still be themselves.”

“I’ll agree with the last part,” Hermione said, “but I still think you’re wishing too much on the first part. Moving along, when you do the ritual, you have to make the potion to the proper specifications according to how far you want to go back. Finally, you have to say the magical chant as you submerge yourself naked in the potion. Then, and only then, if everything has been done correctly, you might be successful.”

Ginny crooked her head. “Right, and so what’s the problem?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Ginny, did you really read all of the ingredient list?”

“Yes. I know what you’re objecting to: the human blood. That will come from me. This body will be dying anyway,” Ginny shrugged.

“You really didn’t read the description of how to do the ritual very carefully, Ginny. It says that you need a pint of blood for every year you want to go back, and a proportional amount for partial years. That has to simmer for an hour for every year, plus partials, before you complete the ritual.” Hermione’s voice was starting to rise. “That means it can’t be your blood because you can’t give up that much

blood and stay conscious, plus the blood has to be freely given from a single person. Ginny, do you realize that you're talking about human sacrifice?!" she finished in a screech.

"Are you really sure?" Ginny sounded a little doubtful now. She grabbed the book and read careful, going a little pale when she finished.

"There's a reason that most soul magic and rituals that require blood are considered Dark. Ginny, you'll be doing Dark Magic, and that's bound to taint you," Hermione argued forcefully.

Ginny put the book down and put her face in her hands, thinking very carefully. "Hermione," she finally said. "I'll agree that the potential for Dark magic is there, but the important part is the intent. You said that the human blood must be freely given, that's not Dark." She looked back at her friend with a pleading look on her face. "Hermione, you have to help me with this. If I do this, everything will be set right, like the way it was meant to be. Not only will I have Harry, but you won't be like you are either. You'll be whole and able to pursue all of your dreams the way you were meant to."

"Or we could both be dead," she said with a scowl. "Look Ginny, I know how much you want Harry, but this is what we have, now. Yes, Dumbledore made some mistakes, but everyone does. Just because things didn't go the way you like them doesn't allow you to play God and try to redo things."

"I'm not trying to play God, Hermione, or at least I don't think I am. I believe there should be a balance to the universe, but it should also tip slightly to the side of the good. The good is supposed to win in the end, and it didn't because of one man's arrogance. I refuse to be stuck with what we have. Look around you, Hermione. We're living in a cave and have almost no hope for much better for a very long time. The rest of the Wizarding world has cut Britain off and they have no way of knowing if the war is really over or not. They also have no incentive to help us. 'Screwed we are', as Colin Creevey liked to say."

"There are always options, Ginny," Hermione tried to reason, ignoring her friend's joke.

Ginny jumped on that. "Options? You want options? OK, how about this. One, we continue on like we are right now for a very long foreseeable future, quite possibly until we die. Two, we give up being witches and try to go Muggle. You might could live that way, but I don't think I can."

"You can, Ginny, you're just not giving yourself enough credit," Hermione said.

"Three," Ginny ignored the objection, "you decide what you want to do, and I'll do my best to get you started that way, and then I end it all and go join Harry and his parents."

"You'd kill yourself?" Hermione was horrified.

"I don't want this, Hermione. I don't know how to say it any plainer. So trying this ritual is no loss for me. You're the perfect person to help me, Hermione, because you don't really have much to lose..."

"So you say," Hermione jumped in. "In the Muggle world, people like me can lead fulfilling lives."

"In the Muggle world, you won't have magic to hold up books and automatically turn pages for you. You won't have Winky to help you. You also won't have me." The brunette looked at her, thinking it all through very carefully. "Hermione, I'm serious. If you want to go Muggle, I'll take you to London and make sure to find someone to care for you; but that will be the end of Magic for you. Everything you've learned since you were eleven will be for naught." That was a low blow, but Ginny did not care.

Hermione closed her eyes and thought.

"Help me, Hermione," Ginny pled, close to tears. "Please help me. If it's within my power, I'll do anything I can for you again. I'll make sure you have a normal seventh year and are Head Girl, if that's what you want. If you want Ron, I'll do my very best to make sure he asks you out in the fourth year this time."

The brunette snorted. "Ginny, if I were to request anything, I'd ask you to make sure to dissuade me from chasing after your brother. Even at twenty he was an immature prat. I seriously doubt that he'd be any better at forty."

"If that's what you want, you've got it. I'll do my best to make Ron grow up better, but I'll also make sure you set your sights somewhere else," Ginny promised.

After a pause, Hermione almost shouted, "Damn! I wished I could pace."

"Help me and I'll make sure you can pace again," Ginny said with an impish grin on her face.

"Ginny, you're a basket case with a one-track mind." Hermione sighed. "Look, there's still the whole time paradox thing and the universe ceasing to exist problem, even if I do help you."

"Of course the universe will cease to exist, Hermione, it has to." Hermione raised an eyebrow at her friend. "If I go back, I'll have changed the timeline, therefore, this universe will cease to exist, but there will be a new one in its place. It all makes sense to me."

"If it were so easy, then others would have done it," Hermione countered.

"Who's to say they haven't. We have a book here about it. I would think the author must have tried."

"Or it could all be theory and complete hogwash. Ginny, you can't know."

Ginny looked at her friend and walked over to put a hand on her shoulder. "I'll take that chance. Please take it with me, Hermione, please," the younger girl begged.

Hermione closed her eyes for a moment. "I'll think about it. No promises about anything, but I'll think about it."

A squeal came out of Ginny as she leaned forward and touched her cheek to her friend's. "You know I'm right, but think about it anyway. I'll start working on the equations." Ginny got up and went over to the nearest table, taking the book with her. There, she copied the equations onto a piece of parchment and started figuring.

It took Ginny into the next day to finish the potion equations. There were many time variables, which begat other variables, such as phase of the moon. In the end, Ginny decided to pick a very specific day and time a week from now to do the ritual and work all of the equations from that point. Then she would have to do it then, even if it meant waiting a few days. She would go back to the summer just before she started school.

Those extra days were needed anyway, as Hermione still had not made up her mind. Even so, Hermione did help Ginny by checking over her work. Between the two of them, the arithmetic work was done three days before the appointed time.

"So, Hermione?" Ginny asked as she finished feeding Hermione dinner.

"I still don't know, Ginny. So many things could go wrong. I mean, you might come out at the wrong time and then it's all for nothing."

"And I might get everything right and only I will know about this alternate timeline and how badly things could have gone, leaving you to live normally again and enjoy many years with your parents."

Hermione glared at her friend.

"Yeah, low blow and all of that rubbish, Hermione, but it's still true."

The injured girl thought some more. "It's just that I'll have to let you kill me and then do magic that I consider Dark, and that makes me worry about you, because you'll take that back with you." Ginny stayed silent. "And Ginny, what's to prevent someone else from doing this? The book came from the Malfoys. Since he's older, can you

imagine what would happen if he got a hold of it? He could kill your family before you're ever born. What am I saying?" she interrupted herself. "He'd kill Harry's parents before they ever get married. He'd make sure Riddle won the war."

"I know," Ginny agreed in a soft voice. "There's more though. The longer I take to make all of the corrections, the greater the chance there is of my being discovered, especially by Dumbledore. I must act quickly and preferably on those things that no one else will see first, leaving the visible things for last. The piece of Riddle's soul in Harry will have to be the last thing I do, before I get him to somehow kill Riddle."

"If you can do it fast enough, he doesn't have to worry about it."

"What are you saying?" Ginny looked at her friend very intently.

"The optimal time to send you back to is to when Harry is starting school. You'll be home alone for that year and so you will have the opportunity to sneak away and gather the Horcruxes. You'll have to get your grandmother's wand and work your magic back up without your parents knowing, but if you can do that, then when Harry faces Riddle at the end of his first year and Riddle has to flee Quirrell, then Riddle will die when he's not 'attached' to anything."

They had discussed the fact that even with the Horcruxes gone, Riddle would probably stay here as long as he possessed something, but if he ever did not, even for the brief time it took to change hosts, then he should leave this world and go onto the next. Even if that theory was wrong, at least Riddle would be mortal and killable. They had found research stating that once a person had to reconstitute a body, it was not possible to create more Horcruxes. That fact made them feel a lot better.

"That's brilliant, Hermione! I wished I had thought of that." Then Ginny sagged. "Of course, that means I'll have to redo my equations..."

"But you've already done them once, so it should be easier this time. And you've already got all the values you need for this half of the trip. Only the destination is changing," Hermione pointed out.

A smile came over Ginny. "So, you're going to help me then?" She eagerly awaited the answer.

Hermione sighed. "I guess so. I'm not sure how you talked me into it, but you did." As Ginny squealed and ran over to her to give her a hug, she muttered, "I so can't believe I'm doing this."

Ginny worked hard, and a day before she had to start the ritual, she had complete her prep work and Hermione had approved it. That made for a very long last day while they waited. Together, they brainstormed on what Ginny would need to do and in what order. They also discussed who could be trusted if Ginny had to have help. Unfortunately, Ginny was probably going to have to tell one person; she just hoped he was trustworthy.

When the day came, Ginny sent Winky away on an errand, telling her not to come back before dinner time tomorrow, as she and Hermione would be involved in a project and it would be dangerous to be disturbed. The little elf agreed, as the situation had come up multiple times during the war.

Now that they were guaranteed to be alone, Ginny moved Hermione into the potions lab and set everything up. That done, she went into her bedroom and took a shower, wanting to be completely clean and not bring any contaminants into the potion with her. Nude, she walked into the potions lab. If that made Hermione uncomfortable, the brunette did not show it. The last thing she did before she started was to take off the last thing she was wearing and what was her most prized possession: her wedding ring. With a kiss, she placed the ring on the worktable. If everything went according to plan, Ginny would get the same ring again in about eight years.

Ginny looked at the clock and saw that it was time. She had everything laid out and ready, she knew what needed to be done, this was it.

While she was sorrowful she had to do what she was about to do, Ginny did not apologize. Instead, she told her friend, "Thank you, Hermione. I appreciate this more than I can tell you." Her eyes started to well with tears, but she did her best to ignore them. The plan must happen.

"Remember your promises, Ginny." Hermione also had tears in her eyes, but they looked like tears of sorrow. Still, she did not back out of the deal.

"I will, Hermione. Your parents will be safe this time and no Ron for a husband..."

"He was a good friend, most of the time..."

"As he was a good brother, most of the time."

"Also, please remember what we talked about. You must resist playing God. Just because someone committed evil in this timeline does not give you the right to take revenge on them in the earlier timeline."

Ginny nodded as she glanced at the clock; there was no extra time. "I'll see you on the other side my friend." With their good-byes said, Ginny picked up a silver knife to start the ritual.

Hermione began. "Take my blood, I give it freely." She did not say another word as the knife in Ginny's hand quickly moved, as if it had to be done then or it would never be done. Hermione's life quietly slipped away as her blood drained into a large silver bucket.

Tears trickled down Ginny's face as she silently and quickly drained the blood. As she finished the first step, her eyes went wide at the problem in front of her. The sacrifice had to be from a single person and Hermione was not a big enough girl to provide the amount of blood Ginny needed; plus there was no time to recalculate the equations based on the blood she did have. She was only a little more than a half pint short, but it was enough of a difference to be disastrous. What was she to do? She could not let her friend's sacrifice be made in vain.

Then it hit her, her first set of equations. She had enough blood for that. That would cause her to have to remeasure all of the other ingredients, but she could do this. They were already calculated and written down.

A moment later, she had the other parchment and started working on it. Right at an hour later, she finished the potion as required. Removing the extra water that was no longer needed in the cauldron, as that affected the time jump too, she poured the blood potion into the big cauldron, adjusted the heat, and let it simmer. She would have to stir it once for each of the next ten hours. After the tenth hour, she needed to wait an extra four minutes, then do the final step.

Ginny started a timer. When it went off, she stirred once and reset the timer. Nine more times she did that. She also ate a little and rested, consulting her final list of things to do when she arrived in her younger self. Ginny also moved Hermione's body; she could not bear to look at her lifeless friend. Her sacrifice had been not only for a good cause, but at Ginny's insistence; still, the girl felt guilt at seeing her dead friend. In a very small way, that comforted her, as she felt it meant that she was not going Dark.

After the tenth hour, Ginny started the small timer for the last four minutes and readied herself. When the timer was almost finished, she hastily stepped into the cauldron. The potion was very hot, almost scalding, but she gritted her teeth and did not stop. As the last grains of sand were running out, she shouted the chant to finish the ritual. On the last word, she grabbed her long red hair and held it close to her as she let herself fall into the hot potion, completely submerging herself. The pain as she slipped under was so bad, she blacked out and knew no more.

((A/N: There's the premise for the story...))

Chapter 2 - Location, Location, Location

Her eyes flew open and saw white. After a few moments of disorientation, she finally recognized the whiteness: it was the ceiling in her room at The Burrow. That seemed important for some reason, but she was having trouble thinking. She had gone to bed last night after her brothers had been arguing over some prank, but she could not remember what. Yet, she also had the memory of brewing some very important potion. But she was very sure she had not been helping her mother brew any potions. It was all so confusing.

Feeling something in her eyes, she rubbed the sleep out of them. As she went to pull her hands away, she looked carefully at her hands. They were too small, and yet, they were also right. A wedding ring was also missing, but that could not be right because she was only ten, to be eleven in a few weeks. No, she turned twenty-one a few weeks ago. She mentally screamed. Why was figuring out what was going on so hard?

She was young, and yet she was old. Over the next few minutes, more “old” memories started coming to her, and then she remembered. With a gleeful smile, she sat up in bed and looked around her bedroom in The Burrow. It had worked! She had really come back in time!

Yes, her hands were too small. Feeling even more different in her body, she pulled the front of her nightshirt away from her and looked down. Yep, no boobs. Damn! That was really too bad. She had liked her adult boobs. Well, to be honest, she had liked what they did for Harry and how he had liked them, but still, it felt weird not to have that weight on her chest any more.

Of course, on the plus side, she would have more time with Harry, years even, and if everything went according to plan, she would get to marry him all over again and get to lose her virginity to him again. She giggled at that, as that would be a lot of fun – again.

As she went through her memories, she found a “fresher” or “newer” set, as well as her “older” set. Her older self knew all of the newer

memories, but she still tried to quickly go over them, looking for inconsistencies. Fortunately, everything seemed to match up.

Happy that everything was working out so far, she got up, put on her robe, and went downstairs for breakfast. At the last landing with one flight of stairs left, voices from kitchen area floated up to her, along with the smells of her mother's cooking. Those smells produced a longing she had not been able to fulfill for several years. Then one voice in particular caused her to freeze. It was Harry.

Now, she was of two minds, almost literally. Her new mind wanted to "eep" and run back to her room. Her old mind wanted to run downstairs, grab him, snog him senseless, and then drag him upstairs to have her wicked way with him. That thought stopped both of her minds. Her new one was hyperventilating, while her old one was disgusted at herself. Lusting after a twelve year old boy who was about nine years younger than she was? What a pervert!

But she wanted him, her Harry. Leaning against the wall, she allowed herself to slowly slide down to the floor, sitting with her thighs against her chest. Wrapping her arms around her legs, she buried her face in her robe between her knees and quietly sobbed. She was so close and yet so far away. Harry was here, but he would not be her Harry for several years yet, probably in the fourth year. If she worked things right, maybe this time he would take her to the Yule Ball and then they would be together again -- forever.

Right then, she purposed that she would not unduly pressure Harry. Tempt him at times, yes; flirt with him, absolutely; but not pressure him. She vowed to herself that she would not do more than hug him or kiss him on the cheek until the Yule Ball, unless he initiated it. The last step where they became one again would have to wait until he was at least seventeen. She did not dare consider the idea that he would not choose her; that would have been heart-rending.

Ginny wiped her tears away and got up. She needed to go wash her face now. She would be friends with him, and not a cowering little fan-girl. She remembered how much Harry did not like that, especially as he got older. That made her wonder if she was the cause of that in the other timeline. Splashing water over her face felt good, and it

hopefully helped to make it look like she had not just been crying. Drying her face, she thought about what she had to do. She would do her best to be normal and friendly around him, maybe even a little flirty, but not too much. Yes, not too much, that was older Harry that had like her flirting with him. For this younger Harry, she just had to show that she was a girl who was her own person. With a smirk as her updated plan came together, she brushed her hair until it was smooth and silky. Harry had never been able to resist the allure of her long red mane.

With a deep breath and a smile on her face, she walked down the stairs into the kitchen. No one noticed her at first, which was just fine. Seeing Harry in her chair, she sat in the empty one next to him; that got her noticed. Harry looked at her and then blushed slightly. Ginny just smiled at him and held out her hand.

“Hi, I’m Ginny. I believe we met last year on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$.”

Harry hesitatingly reached out and shook her hand. “Hi, uh, yeah, I remember.”

“It’s good to have you here. Now there will be two normal people in the house,” she said as she started filling the plate in front of her.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Ron asked somewhat belligerently.

“I’m having a conversation, Ron,” Ginny replied, rolling her eyes at her brother. “You should try it sometime. Maybe you’d have more friends that way.”

“Ooh!” She heard from her left.

“Ouch!” came from the other twin.

“Way to go Ginny,” they said in unison, drawing Ron’s ire to them.

“So, Harry, I’m surprised to see you here, not that you aren’t welcome, because you are, but what brings you here?” Ginny did her best to project calm curiosity.

Harry blushed, again being the object of her scrutiny. While she found that cute, she found it hilarious that Harry stuck his elbow in the butter dish as he suddenly turned around towards her.

The twins started laughing at Harry's predicament. Even Ron seemed to lighten up as he looked at his friend.

"Idiots," she muttered. "It can happen to anyone." She handed a napkin to the boy, who smiled gratefully at her help and her comment.

Harry wiped the butter off and moved the dish to the center of the table. He looked at Ginny and she was patiently looking at him. "Thanks for the napkin."

"Anytime. You were about to tell me about how you got here?"

"Er, right. Well, you see, I was having a spot of trouble at my relatives, and your brothers were nice enough to come rescue me..." He trailed off and looked down at his plate, eating some more as if to prevent more of an explanation.

Ginny nodded at that before she turned to her brothers. "You used Dad's car, didn't you?"

"You should have seen it," Fred started.

"It? You should have seen us, magnificent." George added.

Ginny shook her head as she listened to the story, giving the appropriate responses as needed. She did her best to ask questions, of all four of them. Harry's responses were the shortest, but he did talk to her.

"Ginny!" Ron finally burst out, as if not able to contain himself any more. "What are you trying to do? He's my friend, you don't even know him." A glance showed her twin brothers were shocked at their younger brother.

"What, Ronald? I can't be a friend to Harry too?" she asked scathingly. "I never saw a sign that said 'Boys only' when I walked in. And did

you ever stop to ask Harry's opinion on the matter? Perhaps he'd like another friend. Why don't you stop being jealous and grow up." Ginny realized that Harry was very quiet and looking down. She hoped she had not started them off on a bad footing.

"Gin-Gin," George finally spoke into the growing silence, "this is so unlike you."

"Yeah, why aren't you squeaking and running away from your..."

"Fred!" Ginny growled with her eyes staring holes in her brother. "Finish that question and if you're lucky, you'll live to regret it."

"Harrikins, you want to be careful with this Weasley," George said very seriously as he nodded at his sister. "She is proof that very powerful things can come in small packages."

After a few seconds of silence, Ginny's demeanor change 180 degrees as a big smile came over her. "Thanks George."

Mrs Weasley took that time to come into the room. Looking at the children, she started giving orders to send them on their way. "Fred, George, Ron, outside and remove all the Gnomes from the garden." At their less than pleased looks, she added, "And if you don't like that, then you shouldn't have done something so thoughtless last night." Her gaze moved to her daughter. "Ginny, go get dressed. Harry, you're welcome to accompany the boys, but you don't have to do anything with the gnomes."

"Gnomes? What are those?" Harry asked.

"A real blight, they are," Ron started before his mother's disapproving look stopped him. "Come on, Harry, I'll show you," he said to his friend as he got up.

Ginny watched her past/future husband walk outside with her brothers. As she went upstairs to get dressed, she smiled to herself as she thought about the time she would get to spend with Harry, merely because she was not some shy little fan-girl who could not stay in the same room as Harry for the next three years. Yeah, she

was only about to be eleven, but she would make the most of her circumstances.

That night, Ginny crawled into bed a tired little girl. She had also flung a few gnomes that morning when she had joined the boys. That little exercise has brought back the realities of being eleven again. She did not have the stamina or the build of a battle hardened twenty-one year-old anymore. It would literally take years to get into that condition again, as she would need to go through puberty to get there, but she could help that change along. She would have to start some simple exercises, which would have the nice side-benefit of helping her with her Quidditch game.

She almost laughed out loud as she thought about her afternoon of flying. Her brothers had been so adamantly against her playing, saying that she did not know how to fly well enough. Even more amusingly to her, it had been Harry that had insisted on letting her join. It was not hard for her to guess that he understood what it was like to be left out.

Once she took off on her father's old broom, only Harry on his Nimbus 2000 had a chance of keeping up with her. It had been amazing to fly with him again. He was such a natural. Even with her memories of past skills honed with years of practice, she had trouble keeping up with Harry when he really got going. It had been exciting to fly with him, and to see the shocked expressions on her brother's faces to see her skill.

Remembering the time with Harry brought her thoughts back to her purpose in life for the next year or so. As Harry had a date with destiny, so did she now. She started to review her plan.

First and foremost, she had to get a good wand. Her grandmother's, which her mother had forced on her last time around, would not do. No, she was going to have to cast some difficult magic and needed a wand that suited her. The problem there was getting the money to buy one. "This Ginny" had a little more than four Galleons to her name. A decent wand would cost seven or eight Galleons from

Ollivander. Better yet would be a custom wand that did not have the Ministry tracking charms on it, but that would easily run her double the normal amount.

As she considered what to do, who she could go to, only one person came to mind. Only one person had the money and probably would not hold it over her head: Harry. She would have to make a deal with him. Perhaps a trade of knowledge for a loan. Yes, if she promised to pay him back by Christmas, that would look realistic.

Of course, as she thought about the tasks of getting all of the Horcruxes, she knew where a small fortune was for the taking. With some work, she should be able to get her hands on that by Christmas, then money would never be a problem again. Not that it had been much of a problem last time around either.

Ginny had never been that bothered by her family's financial status, unlike her brother Ron. By the time the war had really gotten started last time, she had been firmly in Harry's closest circle of friends. As he was quite rich, and had the foresight – or good luck – to withdraw most of his money before Gringotts went under, the resistance had plenty of money for their fight. Then she had married into the Potter family. No, money was not a problem last time, and it would not be a problem this time either, assuming her plan worked.

Another part of her overall plan was niggling at her, something about that part did not seem completely right; but in her present exhausted state, the problem or inconsistency was escaping her. With a large yawn, she rolled over to go to sleep. She would have to figure it out later.

The next morning, Ginny came down for breakfast to find Harry there, but no one else was at the table. Her mother was in the kitchen, based on the sounds coming from the other room. Three of her brothers preferred to sleep in; there was no accounting for what Percy would do. Hmm, she thought, she would have to work on Percy to see if she could prevent his estrangement this time.

Deciding to take the opportunity to talk to Harry alone since it had presented itself, Ginny sat beside her “new friend”. “Morning Harry.”

“Good morning, Ginny.”

She noticed that he did not look at her for very long and there appeared to be a slight pink tinge to his face. Ginny almost laughed at the role reversal from last time. Not knowing when someone else might come in, she figured she had better get right to the point. “Hey, Harry,” she whispered. “How would you like to make a deal that would help both of us?”

“What?” he asked in his normal voice, looking back up at her.

“Ssh,” she whispered again. “This is one of those things best kept a secret.”

He gave her a quizzical look, continuing to look her in the eye.

“How much money do you have in your trunk?”

Harry shrugged. “Don’t know,” he whispered back. “Forty or fifty Galleons. Why?”

Ginny smiled. “That should do. Loan that to me now and I’ll get you something you really need, and something I really need, plus I’ll pay you back the money I need at Christmas time.”

“What do I really need?” he asked with the expected curiosity.

“You need two books and a very special necklace,” she whispered calmly and with a straight face.

Harry jerked up and sat very straight in his chair. “A necklace?” he asked in his normal voice.

Ginny was about to shush him when her mother walked in. “Oh, Ginny. I didn’t know you were up. Good, you’re eating. When you’re finished, you and Harry can go play until the boys get up. I have some things for everyone to do later.”

"Yes, Mum," her daughter dutifully answered.

"And Harry, have a few more pieces of bacon. I think you still look too thin."

"Yes, Mrs Weasley," Harry told her as she left to return to the kitchen.

Ginny smiled at him. "That's the way to deal with Mum. Be respectful and tell her what she wants to hear, while also being as vague as possible. You can almost get away with murder with her if you're respectful; more-so with Dad, but it works with Mum too," she said quietly. "It also helps that you're not really her child, although she does think of you that way."

"Really?" Harry got a wistful look on his face.

"Harry, I heard what my brothers said they found at your relatives' place." His head jerked around towards her, with an intense stare on his face. "It's pretty bad there, isn't it?"

He looked down at his plate, moving the last bite of eggs around but not eating them.

After what seemed like a long gap of silence, Ginny went on. "Listen, Harry. If you ever need to talk about it to get it out of your system, I'll listen and I promise I won't judge you or think any less of you. You'll still be just Harry to me." He looked back up at her with astonishment on his face. "And Harry, I swear to you," her voice lowered to a whisper again, "I'll do everything in my power to help you get out of ever going back there."

His eyes grew big. "How?"

"I don't know, Harry, but I'll find a way. You might have to go back for a few days next summer, but I will find a way to get you out of there and make it so you never have to go back," she swore fiercely.

He looked at her very intently for a long moment. She held his gaze, trying to prove herself worthy of him. Of course, it helped that she

loved to gaze into his lovely green eyes. Finally, he nodded. "Thanks, Ginny. Even if you can't, thanks for believing in me."

She gave him her best smile before she drained the last of her morning juice.

"So Ginny, what do you need..." he stopped as he heard multiple footsteps on the stairs. A few seconds later, the twins came into view.

"Ah, look what we have here..."

"It's so sweet." Both twins were grinning like idiots.

Harry looked down and grabbed the last piece of bacon off of his plate and shoved the whole thing into his mouth.

Ginny just shook her head. "Yeah, yeah, tease all you want, brothers mine, but Harry and I both know it's all a joke to you, right Harry?" She hoped to set him at ease, but he just blushed and got up.

"Come on Harry, let's go fly," Ginny encouraged him. "These sleepy-heads can catch up with us later." She headed for the back door and Harry was quick to follow. It looked like she had established a friendship with him and she was very happy about that. Once they each retrieved a broom out of the shed, both of them took off into the sky.

Harry hovered over the middle of the paddock about thirty feet in the air. When Ginny caught up to him, he relaxed on his broom and turned to her. "So, Ginny, what do you need the money for?"

She smiled. She had assumed that was his interrupted question. "I'm sure Ron's told you that we're not the richest family around?"

"Sure, but I don't care."

"Thanks, Harry." She flashed him a big smile and he blushed slightly. "Well, Mum's already mentioned that she's going to make me use her mother's wand, but I want a new wand that attuned to me."

“The wand chooses the wizard”, Harry murmured.

“Yeah, that’s what I’ve always heard too.” She did not bother to mention it was from Harry in the other timeline, but she had heard that. “Anyway, I wanted to get my own wand, and one that doesn’t have the Ministry tracking spells.”

His head jerked up to look at her. “You mean...”

“Yeah,” she answered when he had trailed off. “I’ll obey the Secrecy from Muggle law, but I want to be able to do magic whenever I want to. I’ll have to be careful not to be caught by Mum and Dad, but I don’t see why some stupid law should stop me from doing magic whenever I want. I am a witch,” she said proudly.

“So if I got a wand like that...”

Ginny could see the wheels turning in his head and she laughed. “Yeah, mostly.”

“Mostly?”

“Magic tracking is done in two parts. A special tracking charm on the wand by all officially licensed wand makers helps. That along with the magic monitors which can sense magic in areas that aren’t supposed to have magic.”

“But that means...” Harry trailed off as he thought it through.

“Exactly, even with the tracking charm on your wand, you can do magic if you’re in a magical place, like at school or here. The monitor can’t tell if it’s illegal magic or not. So they have to err on the side of caution and assume that you’re doing magic under the supervision of the adults here.”

“Bloody hell! That’s unfair!” Harry looked as outraged as he sounded.

“Yeah, it’s really unfair to Muggleborns.” Ginny had almost said “to Hermione”, but had caught herself just in time. She could have explained that away by saying Ron had written about their

Muggleborn friend, but it was best to avoid scrutiny of how she knew of Hermione.

“So I would have always gotten in trouble with magic at my relatives house.”

“Yep. You’ve managed to avoid it so far, haven’t you?” She looked at him, curious to know if a house-elf was repeating what she knew.

He looked down at the broom he was on. “Er, no.”

“No? What happened?” She had to ask.

Harry looked around for a moment. “Long story, but, uh, I didn’t do the magic, this magical creature did, but I got a warning anyway.”

She looked at him for a minute, both of them still hovering and enjoying the morning breeze. “Talk to Dad about it, Harry. Tell him what happened and get him to take you to the Ministry to appeal it. You can have them do a spell on your wand to show you didn’t cast the spell they said you did, and they’ll have to take it off of your record.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Wow, thanks Ginny!” He seemed to be embarrassed by her smiling at him again. “Say, what did you think I really needed?”

As she was about to answer, her three brothers came out of the house and started running for the shed. “I’ll have to tell you later, but if you can get me the money tonight, we can pick everything up when we go shopping for our school things. I think Mum is going to take us in a few days. You’ll be glad you did this.”

“OK, I’ll trust you on this.”

She laughed. “You will be glad, Harry. I think I can also say that this is the start of a very profitable friendship.”

He gave her a strange look at that statement, but did not get the time to pursue it as Ron and the twins flew up with an old Quaffle in hand.

That evening, Harry had stopped by her room just long enough to toss her a bag with forty-eight Galleons, nine Sickles, and five Knuts. When she added her money in, she had a few Knuts over fifty-three Galleons. It should be enough.

The next evening after dinner, Ginny made an excuse to go clean her room. She locked her door from the inside with a key and from her closet, pulled out one of her father's full length cloaks and her grandmother's wand. With the wand, she did a few glamours on herself and now she looked a foot taller and sounded like a man the age of her father. Putting on the cloak and pulling up the hood, she thought about the area outside of the Leaky Cauldron in Diagon Alley and Apparated.

After feeling the familiar squeeze, she found herself right where she wanted to, which made her smile. She still had it. With a purposeful stride, she made her way to a store in Knockturn Alley. It was dusk and this was prime time for the district of less than reputable stores. Looking like she knew she should be there and ignoring everyone she walked past, she avoided all trouble with the drunks and prostitutes. Finding the store she had visited once in the other timeline, she entered and happily found that it was empty of customers.

"Yeah?" asked a gravelly voice.

"I need a custom wand," her older male voice said.

The old shopkeeper stepped out of the shadows and looked "him" over. Apparently, the well kept but older looking cloak passed inspection. "That'll be fifty Galleons and it'll take two hours."

"I'll give you twenty and I'll come pick it up in two days," she countered.

Laughter filled the shop, which turned into a cough as the old man had laughed too hard. "A lovely sense of humor you have. Forty and not a Knut less."

Ginny was not happy with the price, as it had not cost nearly as much last time. Then again, last time they had been in a war and every shop was happy to get any business it could. That must have made more of an effect than she had realized. Not saying anything, she looked around at some glass cabinets with various things in them. With a swagger that was not naturally hers, she moved over to see what was in them. After a moment, she saw pendent with a Tiger's Eye stone.

"That necklace and pendent," a manly finger came out of the cloak and pointed. "What charms does it have on it?"

The old man came over to see what she was pointed at. "It's guaranteed to stop mind attacks."

"Guaranteed?"

"That's what I said," he retorted.

"Guaranteed or double my money back?" Ginny fingered the end of her wand.

The shopkeeper looked affronted. "All my merchandise is guaranteed."

Now Ginny chuckled. "I know, or I wouldn't have come here." At the man's questioning look, Ginny added, "I just wanted to hear you say it. I'll give you forty for both the wand and the necklace, and another twenty if you can find another necklace just like that when I come pick up the wand in two days."

The old man looked more interested as the amount of money went up. "Fifty-five now and twenty-five if I can get another necklace."

"You can have the twenty-five on the second one, but only fifty for the wand and this one here; and I want a receipt to prove I've already

paid you.” Ginny held her breath, she really wanted to go back home with something in her money purse.

A laugh filled the shop again. “You’re good, I’ll give you that. Come over here and pick out the wood.”

Ginny slowly exhaled and walked over. Ten minutes later she had picked out an ash blank and a phial containing the heart-string of a Gryffin. That combination caused the shopkeeper to raise an eyebrow, but Ginny just laughed and pulled out Harry’s money purse. As she counted out fifty Galleons, the old man got her necklace and wrote up a receipt.

They exchanged and Ginny told him, “I’ll be back in two, maybe three days. Be sure it’s ready.” The old man snorted, and Ginny left.

As it was now dark, Ginny quickly made her way back to the Apparation point. She passed two Aurors on patrol near the entrance to Knockturn Alley, but they had no reason to stop her and left her alone. A few minutes later, she was back in her room, with none the wiser. A couple of “Finites” removed the glamours. After a few waves of the wand to clean her room to account for the time, the borrowed cloak went back into her closet. She kept the wand and necklace on her.

Deciding she had some time before she could talk to Harry alone, she went up to Percy’s room. Ginny hoped she could talk some sense into her overly ambitious and stupid brother.

A little after midnight, the whole house had been quite for nearly an hour. Putting on her house-robe, as if she was going to the bathroom, she quietly went down the hall to the room Harry was staying in, which was Bill’s old room. Opening the door, she saw it was dark, so she went in and closed the door behind her.

“Harry?” she whispered.

“Ginny?”

“Well, it’s not my mother,” she answered, barely suppressing a giggle.

“Here, I’ll light the candle.”

“No, don’t,” she commanded, and he obeyed. “If someone else walks down the hall to the bathroom, they’ll see the light under the door and they might come in.” She continued to whisper and he did too.

“OK. So, you said you had something for me? Did you find it that quick?”

“Yeah, I got lucky. It cost a bit more than I thought it would and I ordered another for me, so I spent more than I had planned, but I think you’ll find it worth it. I promise I’ll pay you back at Christmas if not before.”

“If it’s for a good reason, that’s fine,” Harry assured her. “So what is it?”

Ginny silently did a quick Legilimens and read his current thoughts, which showed him to be very curious about what she had and a slight thrill for her sneaking into his room. That last part quickened her heart as she sat down on the edge of his bed. “Hold still and I’ll put it around your neck. You should always keep this on, especially when you’re at school.”

“Why?”

She finished and pulled back, purposefully placing her hands in her lap so as to avoid the temptation to run them through his hair. “Because it blocks all mind probes.”

“What?” he asked in his normal voice.

“Ssh,” she hissed and sat silently to make sure no one was coming. He seemed to understand and stayed quiet too. She studied his outline in the pale moonlight. She wished there was more moonlight and they were both about five years older.

Silently doing another quick Legilimens, she found that she could not read his current thoughts. So it worked.

After no other sounds, other than the ghoul in the attic, were heard, she continued on. "I've heard the stories from my brothers and I've heard things from my parents. Harry, have you ever felt like Dumbledore knew what you were thinking? Like he was staring straight through you into your soul?"

She saw Harry's head slowly nod.

"My brothers say that Snape is the same way, only worse."

"I'll agree. It seems like he knows what I'm thinking sometimes, just so he can pick the worst time to do something to me."

Ginny sighed. "From what I can gather, he probably is, Harry, and this necklace will protect you from that. Your private thoughts will now stay private."

"Really? That's brilliant!" he excitedly whispered. "And you tried to order another so you could be safe too?"

"Yeah, I hope you don't mind." She really did not need one as she knew Occlumency, but the necklace would shield her without making it obvious she knew the mind skill.

"No, it makes sense. Thanks!"

"No problem. Keep it hidden under your shirt, Harry. That will drive anyone who tries to read your mind crazy, as someone your age shouldn't be able to block your mind. It will only be funnier because they can't ask you about it without revealing they were trying to read your mind, which is immoral in the least, and illegal in many cases."

Harry quietly laughed. "That will drive Snape batty. So, how do you know all of this?"

He could not see her smile or blush, but she did both. "Remember I said I'll give you two books too?"

“Yeah.”

“When we go pick up our school books, I’ll show you two small books you should buy while you’re there. One of them is on customs in the Wizarding World. That will explain a lot of the things that I would think you find strange. When you understand all that, you’ll be able to deal with things better.”

Harry snorted. “I bet Hermione already had that one.”

“Hermione? I’ve heard that name somewhere.” She played dumb.

“One of my best friends. I’ll introduce you to her on the train. I think you’ll like her. She’s very smart, like you.” His outline made it look like he was looking down.

“Thanks, Harry.”

After a long pause, he asked, “What was the other book you said I needed.”

“Well, if your Potions class was anything like Fred and George’s, then I bet you had a hard time and didn’t feel like you learned much. Am I right?”

Harry snorted again. “You got that right. Snape really didn’t teach at all. He just made fun of me and my father, then pointed to the board and had us work without even explaining anything. Plus,” his whispered turned a little angry, “he let the Slytherins sabotage our work.”

Ginny quietly “tsked”. “That sounds like my brother’s class. Well, there a little book called ‘Fundamentals of Potions’ that explains all the basics of Potions and why things work the way they do. Once you understand that, a lot more of the class will make sense. My twin brothers swear by the book and they are really good at Potions, even though they try not to look like it.”

“Really?”

“Harry, didn’t you learn not to accept food from them last year?” she asked in an exasperated whisper.

He was silent for a few seconds. “No, they didn’t ever try anything on me.”

“You got lucky then. I bet you don’t escape this year. They like to pick on us because we’re family and we always forgive them. Now that you’re more like family, you’ll probably become a target too.”

Harry seemed to go rigid and she wished she could see his expression. She bet it was the dreamy one and that made her want to blast the Dursleys and Dumbledore into next week. One day, both of them would feel her wrath over what they did to her Harry.

“Thanks,” he finally got out so softly she could barely hear him. “I’ll watch out.”

She smiled and enjoyed the moment before a yawn caught her. “I better be going. It’s late.”

“Yeah, and thanks, Ginny.”

“Anything for a friend, Harry. We’re friends, aren’t we?” she asked tentatively.

“Of course, Ginny. I’ll take every friend I can get,” he said seriously.

“Thanks, Harry. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Ginny.”

Ginny went back to her room a happy girl. So far, her plan was going well, despite the last minute change and coming back a year late.

Three days later, all of Ginny’s family, even her father, went shopping for school supplies. The Weasley boys and Harry enjoyed the cart ride to the vaults. Just before Harry retrieved some gold from his vault

in Gringotts, Ginny winked at him to remind him to get some extra. Harry blushed mightily as he got out of the cart for his vault.

Her brothers were impatient in the bank, wanting to do other things. Ginny's mother was not much better, as she had heard that Gilderoy Lockhart would be at the bookstore today. If her mother only knew what a fraud the man was.

They also met the Grangers there. This was Ginny's official introduction to this Hermione. Their meeting was just like in the other timeline. Hermione was polite and friendly, although the two girls did not talk much for the rest of the day. Hermione spent most of her time talking to Ron and Harry.

Ginny was of two minds about what to do in the bookstore. On the one hand, she considered doing everything just like last time, as she really wanted that diary of Riddle's; because if she did not get it from Malfoy again, she was not sure how she was going to track it down. On the other hand, she really wanted to save Harry the embarrassment Lockhart caused and show the fraud for what he was. In the end, her need to get the Horcrux pushed her desire to help Harry avoid a little embarrassment to the side. He would survive the bookstore -- again.

The tricky part of the day would be sneaking away to get her new wand. Although, if required, she could wait until after they went home and she could sneak back here for a few minutes.

After Harry rejoined them, they started their shopping at Madam Malkin's. It took longer than Ginny remembered from the first time, but maybe that was just because she hated shopping for school robes. She enjoyed shopping for dress robes, but school robes were boring. On they went to each store until they came to the bookstore.

While her mother stood in line to purchase their books and get a good look at Lockhart, Ginny showed Harry the two extra books he needed to buy. Since Ron was not standing next to him to say something stupid, Harry bought a couple of others. Ginny found that amusing but did not say anything.

Like last time, Lockhart saw Harry and made a big deal out of it, and Harry also gave Ginny his “free” books. Ginny was on pins and needles until she heard a voice she had come to truly hate. A voice that, when she thought about it, gave her enough hate to cast any Unforgiveable curse. A voice that belonged to the person that had killed Ron and several of her other friends.

“I bet you enjoyed that, didn’t you Potter,” drawled a blond boy with his usual sneer.

Ginny watched the altercation between Lucius and her father develop like last time, although she did her best to keep her cauldron of books in the corner of her eye this time. When Lucius Malfoy threw one of her books back into her cauldron, she noticed that it was fatter than it should have been – again. She was so happy and yet so angry, that she could not stop herself from casting a rotting spell on his cane. In about an hour, it would be little more than sawdust, unless he stopped the curse quickly. Fortunately for her, no one, not even her mother saw her do the spell in all the chaos. She was quite pleased with herself and could only hope that the rot affected the man's wand, which she knew was in the top of the cane.

Since they went home immediately after the incident in the bookstore, Ginny never made it back to pick up her new wand. Fortunately for her, on the way upstairs to her room, Harry nonchalantly passed her his money bag and she smiled at him.

Closing her bedroom door, she quickly reapplied the glamours, got the cloak, and Apparated back to Diagon Alley. With the receipt in hand, the shopkeeper gave her no problems picking up the wand. As she held it for the first time, she could feel a hum coming from it. A wave produced a multitude of golden sparks.

“Nice work,” Ginny’s altered voice said. “Did you find another necklace like the other?”

The shopkeeper pulled one out. After inspecting it, Ginny pulled out twenty-five Galleons and handed it over. With a thanks thrown over her shoulder, she quickly left the shop and the shopping district.

Ginny had barely returned home when there was a knock on her door and she heard her mother. "Ginny? Is everything all right?" With all the speed she could muster, she removed the glamours and tore the cloak since she took it off too quickly. With only the thought of trying to avoid getting caught, she tossed the ruined garment under her bed just as her mother opened the door.

"Yeah, no problem, Mum. I was just looking at some of the things I got for school. Was something wrong?"

"Well..." her mother hesitated. "I was walking by and I heard a noise like... But that's silly because you can't... Never mind, I must have been imagining things."

"Sure Mum. I'll just hang these robes up." She picked one up off the bed while her mother shook her head and left the room. That was close, she thought. Very close.

That night, after everyone was in bed, she returned Harry's money pouch to him and thanked him profusely for the loan. After that, she Apparated to her father's shed and found some small pieces of metal about the size she needed. Apparating back to her room, she used her new wand to "weld" a metal box together from the metal scraps. With five sides together, she pulled the diary out of her cauldron. The mere touch of it created a connection and caused her to want to write in it. Pulling up her Occlumency barriers reduced the desire to use the diary just enough that she could place it in the metal box and weld the top on. Lastly, she did a transfiguration to turn the tin metal to lead.

Dropping her Occlumency barriers, she found no desire to interact with the diary. She breathed a sigh of relief as Hermione's theory had proven correct. Wrapping the heavy little box in a pair of knickers, she hid it in her closet. It would go to school with her and she would destroy it there.

During the last three weeks of summer, much to Ron's dismay, Ginny hung out with the boys and Harry accepted her better than her brothers. She was quite pleased that he treated her like one of the boys.

In fact, one afternoon, Ron had gotten upset that Ginny was there and had stalked off to his room. Ginny had gone on a walk with Harry around the back garden. Along the way, she spotted a small snake.

“Oh look, isn’t he cute?” She pointed to the little garden snake. “I wish I could understand snakes.” That felt so contrived and phony to Ginny, but she was not sure what else to say. Fortunately, Harry was not bothered.

He stood there a second and tilted his head a little. “He’s saying he wished he had nice juicy bug.”

Ginny raised both eyebrows in surprise. “You can understand him?”

“Er, yeah?” he finally said, not understanding why she asked.

Ginny just smiled as another part of her plan fell into place. “I think that’s really cool, Harry, but you shouldn’t tell anyone.”

“Uh, why not?” he looked confused. “I’ve done it before when I was at a zoo with my cousin.”

“You understand that I’m not bothered, right?” He nodded. “Well, you also need to understand that I’m more tolerant of a lot of things. Most people think that if you can talk to snakes, meaning you’re a Parseltongue, then you’re Dark.” Harry looked alarmed. “But don’t worry, Harry,” she hastily added. “They’re just being stupid. Some people can talk to other animals too, so I don’t see any difference. Like I said, they’re just being stupid, but there’s no reason to do that in front of others and invite trouble either.”

Harry thought about it for a long moment before he gave her a tentative smile. “Thanks for the advice, Ginny.”

“No problem, Harry. That’s what friends are for.” She gave him her big smile and watched him blush and turn away. She chuckled and said, “You’re so fun to tease, Harry.”

He blushed again before he looked at her. "One day, Ginny, you'll get what's coming to you for doing that."

She chuckled and looked him right in the eye. "I look forward to that, Harry." He blushed again but did not look away. This time, she looked away first and continued their stroll around the garden. Ginny felt she was making good progress with Harry.

When Ginny crawled into bed for real the night before she was to leave for Hogwarts, she was a tired "little girl".

As soon as everyone was in bed several hours earlier, she had put her jeans back on, along with a long sleeve T-shirt. Charming them both black, along with her hair, she Apparated to the Riddle graveyard. There, she put a Bubble Head Charm on and quickly dug up Riddle Sr to Vanish his bones. She hoped things never got this far, but this seemed like a prudent move – just in case.

After the deed and as she was about to fill the hole back in, she heard a noise behind her. Spinning, she was glad to have her wand in hand as she saw the big snake yet again – although the first time in this timeline. Without hesitation, she fired off a Cutting hex and chopped the snake in two as it coiled to strike. Checking with a revealing spell, she saw nothing magical about the snake now, so she moved it into the open pit in front of her and cast a Fireball spell on it. After it was reduced to ashes, she covered it up. Good-bye Nagini, she thought.

That done, she Apparated to the Gaunt house. There, she found a number of rats and transformed them into monkeys. The monkeys were sent into the house one by one to trigger all of the traps that she could not quickly neutralize. Eight dead monkeys and twenty minutes of hard charm work later, she had the Gaunt family ring. Resisting the urge to put the ring on her finger, she put it into a small tin box she had taken from her mother. After transfiguring the metal into lead, the urge to wear the ring disappeared.

Apparating back home, the new little box along with the box with the diary, went into her school trunk. She had three Horcruxes under control and four to go.

She would sleep until the last minute tomorrow to try and recover from her magical workout tonight. In many ways, this was no different than most nights since she had received her custom wand. Most nights she had practiced her magic late at night to try and build her magical core. A person's magical core was like a muscle and she was determined to make hers bigger as fast as possible.

((A/N: Ginny has a good start on her tasks, but all will not go as easily. :-))

Chapter 3 – School's In

The next morning, September the first, was chaos. Happy she had packed the night before, she almost staggered down to breakfast in a stupor from exhaustion. While her brothers and Harry were rushing around getting their things together, Ginny ate.

Before they left, she prompted each of her brothers for things they had forgotten, remembering from last time. Avoiding the extra trips back to The Burrow saved them over ten minutes, but even then, they were still having to rush to make the train.

Remembering back to last time, she decided to give Harry and her brother a break. As the family reached the portal for Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, she tugged on her mother's sleeve before they could go through.

"Mum, wait. I want Harry and Ron to show me how to go through the portal," she asked sweetly.

"Ginny," her mother replied with exasperation in her voice, "we have to go through, we're about to miss the train and you've been here before. I'm not playing the 'What are we doing' game with you like I did last year."

"Please, mum. A few seconds won't matter. Please?" Ginny put her best 'innocent little girl pleading' face on.

Ginny could tell that her mother really wanted to just drag her through, but she instead turned to the last two boys, as her other three brothers and her father had already gone through the barrier. "Ron, Harry," she said with a hint of exasperation, "please go on through for your sister." Ginny smiled innocently at them.

Ron rolled his eyes but started walking anyway. Harry just gave her a tentative smile before he started walking, practically on Ron's heels. Just like in the other timeline, the two ran into a solid barrier and bounced back. Unlike last time, her mother was there to witness the problem.

“What in the name of Merlin...?” Her mother let go of Ginny’s hand and walked over. Touching the portal, she found it solid too. Shaking her head, she turned and glared at the three children. “All three of you, stay right here in the area of the Muggle-repelling charms while I go get your father. If you go anywhere before I get back, you’ll be sorry you woke up this morning.” With that stern warning, she Apparated away. The three looked at each other and shrugged.

Less than a half minute later, she reappeared with a crack, followed by three more cracks. Ginny saw her father and two more people dressed in Auror robes.

“Quickly, everyone one grab onto your trunk,” her father told everyone. He walked over to her, and seeing that she was tightly holding onto her old trunk. She felt herself be squeezed down, as if forced through a small tube, before she found herself on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. She shuddered at the odd sensation. Apparating yourself was so much nicer than being Apparated by someone else; although she could not tell her father that. A few seconds later, more cracks sounded behind her as her mother and the two Aurors reappeared, each Auror also with a boy and his trunk.

Her mother quickly gave each child a hug and then shooed them towards the train. They barely made it on before the train blew a long whistle and started to move. As Ginny drug her trunk after her, following her brother and Harry, she smiled to herself for averting a needless crisis. Of course, that still left the problem of Dobby, and he was one problem she had overlooked in her plans. But how hard could one house-elf be to handle, she asked herself. After all, she knew about the diary and everything that was going on and the house-elf did not.

Ahead, Ginny saw Harry open a compartment and drag his trunk in. Ron followed him, so she did too. Inside, she saw Hermione was already there and she smiled at the bushy-haired brunette. As she was about to say, “hi”, she got an earful from the other bench.

“Ginny! What are you doing here? Go find your own place to sit,” Ron said scathingly.

She could hardly believe the vindictiveness of her brother. Based on the expression of Harry and Hermione, they were having trouble believing this was happening too. Well, she was going to put a stop to this right now. Looking at her other two friends, she calmly said, "Excuse us a minute, I'm afraid you're going to have to witness some ugly family business."

Turning to her brother, who was very red faced from anger, she stepped towards him, reached up and grabbed his ear just like their mother did from time to time, and yanked down so that he had to sit and she could stand over him. He yelped at her action.

"Ron, I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but you're going to have to let your jealousy go so you can grow up and have friends who really care about you. Why do you not want me here?" She did not give him time to answer. "Because you don't want to share Harry or Hermione with me. You've been like this all summer since Harry arrived. Why?" Again she did not give him time the answer. "Because you're jealous."

She paused to take a breath, but Ron still did not speak. It was hard to say if he was more scared or angry.

"And I know that's not the end of it either. You're also jealous of Harry because he has fame and money. But that's totally stupid. Do you know why he has fame and money? Because his parents were killed and he had to grow up all alone not knowing he was really a wizard. Do you really want to have no family? Have people look at you, gawk at you, and point at you everywhere you go so you never get a moment of peace? Can't you see that being famous is actually a bad thing and that he doesn't want it?"

Realizing what she just said, she stopped and turned to Harry, who still had an amazed expression. "Sorry about that, Harry, but he needs to know what it's really like for you." Harry just nodded with an absent look, saying nothing.

She turned back to her brother who was losing the scared look and was going back to looking very angry. Now was the time to end this, she thought. "Ron, don't you realize that Harry would gladly trade

places with you right now if he could? Don't you realize that he considers you richer than he is?"

Ginny stopped to let that soak in, and to her surprise, it did look like Ron was thinking at least part of it through.

Finally, Ron shook his head and angrily told her, "You're barmy."

Ginny sighed, she had not convinced him. "Harry, help me. Tell him how you feel about what he has." She looked at him and saw Harry looking down, obviously trying not say anything. "Harry, please. He needs to know or it will cause problems later. I know you don't like to talk about this, but Ron doesn't understand what it's like to be you."

"Oh, and you do Ginny?" Ron retorted.

"Yeah, she does," Harry said softly. All heads swiveled to look at him. "I'd give everything I have to be you, Ron. You don't know how good you've got it."

Ron's eyes bugged out.

"Look Ron, you've got a family, and a family that loves you. You've got parents who love you. You've got your own room and you want to go home for Christmas and the summer. You've got decent clothes and toys too. You've got brothers and a sister to hang around with and do things with. You have all the food you want to eat. You're also considered normal. No one makes fun of you just because you got some stupid scar on your forehead that you have no memory of. You're considered normal. People aren't out to get you either."

Ron was looking down at his shoes now.

"I know your life isn't perfect, Ron, but Ginny's right. I'd gladly trade lives with you." Harry turned to face the window. His reflection showed him to expressionless, but little twitches gave his internal struggles away.

Ginny felt very bad for doing that to Harry, but she hoped this little episode would help everyone, Harry included, in the long run.

As she considered what to do next, the door to the compartment opened and an all too familiar voice drawled, "Well, well, well, what do we have here but..."

Ginny pulled her wand out when he started talking and she took one step towards the Slytherin. Grabbing his robes with her left hand to pull him a little closer, she shoved her wand up under his chin, pressing the tip into the soft part like a knife. "Malfoy," she growled and glared at him, "we did not invite you in here, so I don't appreciate you walking in and acting like you own the place, especially when you don't. Now leave and don't come back unless you want me to take your wand and shove it so far up your arse your mouth glows when you cast Lumos." She wondered if she could truly reform Draco Malfoy or if she would have to dispose of him.

Although he wore a scared look, he did manage to say, "But you're just a firstie."

She laughed at him. "You of all people should know that some Pureblood families teach their children magic before they come to school. Besides, six brothers taught me that it doesn't take magic to hurt someone." She pushed her wand up higher, forcing him on his toes to avoid the wand poking him too hard. "So take your followers, leave us, and don't come back." She shoved hard backwards, and because he was on his toes, he was unable to stop himself and went flying backwards into Crabbe and Goyle behind him. All three went down in a heap.

There was laughter from the corridor, so others must have seen. That little amusement was just enough to calm her and prevent her from hexing the Slytherin into a small pieces. Closing the door, she turned and sat down on the bench next to Hermione.

When she noticed that the other three were giving her astonished looks, she asked, "What?"

Hermione spoke for the first time since greeting her. "What you just did with Malfoy? You..." She seemed unable to verbalize her true feelings.

"I just did what you've probably always wanted to do," Ginny explained like it was an everyday occurrence.

"But you'll get into trouble," Hermione objected.

"I doubt it."

"Brilliant, totally brilliant!" her brother said, the disagreement between them forgotten for the moment.

Ginny smiled and looked at Harry. His smile was turning back to a frown as the Malfoy moment was over. It did not take a genius to realize the earlier conversation was coming back to his mind. Hoping for the best, she got up and walked the step over so she was in front of him and knelt down. Taking his hand in both of her hands, she held it tightly.

"Harry, I'm really sorry for having to say that, for causing you pain, but please know that I did that with the best of intentions. Ron didn't understand and would not have understood for a very long time. It would have affected your friendship in ways that neither of you would have liked. I'm also almost certain that you're wondering why I think I have the right to interfere in your life like this. Am I right?"

He nodded, although he was not looking at her.

"I know I don't have the right to tell you what to do and I wasn't trying to hurt you or manipulate you. I was just trying to fix a misunderstanding that my brother had. I don't think I betrayed any confidences that you've told me, but if I have, I'm really sorry, Harry, and I beg you to forgive me. I still hope you consider me your friend, because I want to be yours. I mean you, Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived; that doesn't matter to me. I've enjoyed getting to know you and I like you for who you are now, and for the wonderful person I think you'll become." She stopped there and hoped that set things right. She also hoped she had not sounded stupid or like she was trying to mislead him. It was all straight from her heart.

Harry slowly turned away from the window and looked at her. She did not flinch and looked him straight in the eyes. His gaze bored into her. She did not think he could come into her mind, but she lowered her mental shields so that he could see the truth of her statement in her eyes. After a long moment, in which neither of their friends said anything, for which Ginny was grateful, Harry finally gave her hand a small squeeze.

Ginny let a small smile come over her as she took a deep breath, only now becoming aware that she had not been breathing while she waited. "Thank you," she whispered before she stood back up and moved back to her place -- her hands feeling cold after letting his go.

"Are you all right, Harry."

He looked up at Hermione and nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine." He smiled at her and took a deep breath, as if trying to purge the bad feelings. "I'm really fine."

Then he looked at Ginny and smiled as if to say things were fine between them; she smiled back at him in gratitude.

"I think I need to go to the loo. I'll be back in a few minutes." Harry got up and started to leave.

Before he could open the door, Ron grabbed his sleeve and stopped him. "Harry, mate. I -- You know I'm not good with feelings and stuff, but Ginny was at least a little right. I have wished I was you, but I don't think I really understood what that meant. I'm still not sure I do, but I can see that your life is not as good as I thought, and maybe it's not so bad to be me."

Ginny could not help but smile. At least some of her message had gotten through. He did not say the magic words of "I'm sorry", but then Ron never did. Still, this was very close for him.

Harry seemed to understand that and nodded. "Friends, Ron?"

Ron nodded. "Friends."

“Good, because I need friends.” Harry turned and looked at Hermione, who nodded back. He then turned and looked at her. Ginny smiled and nodded too. “Like the movie says, ‘All for one and one for all!’”

Hermione and Ginny repeated it back to him in unison. “All for one and one for all!”

Ron looked puzzled and asked, “What’s a movie?”

Harry snorted and then chuckled. “Hermione, I’ll leave that to you.” He opened the compartment door and left.

Hermione started explaining Muggle movies as Ginny watched and tried not to laugh at her brother. Hermione was still trying to get Ron to understand when Harry returned five minutes later.

“Weasley, Ginevra,” Professor Minerva McGonagall called out.

Ginny was the last student of her year to be sorted. She walked forward, having no fear of the sorting process. Of course, that did not mean that she was not concerned as to what might happen with the Sorting Hat. Would it be able to tell there was two Ginnys in her body? If so, what would it do? Would her secret come out? If so, many of her plans would be ruined.

She took the hat from Professor McGonagall and placed it on her head as she sat down.

“Hmm, another Weasley,” she heard in her head. “What?! This can’t be, it’s not right! I’ve already seen you before. Do you realize what you’ve done?”

“Perfectly,” she thought to the hat. “I’m making the attempt to restore balance to the world.”

“But I can’t sort you, you’ve already been sorted.”

She mentally sighed. "If you'll look closely, you'll see that part of me has been sorted, and part of me hasn't. You can sort the unsorted me and not violate your rules."

The hat seemed to harrumph at that before it went quiet for a few seconds. "I suppose that is true, but then where do I put you? Where you belong or where the other part of you went? No, never mind, what am I thinking? If I am to sort the new part of you, then it must be on its own merit, yes... Hmm, you know, you are naturally very cunning and ambitious. Yes, very much so. I know exactly where to put you."

Before the Hat could go any further, Ginny reached up and grabbed the bill with her hand so it could not talk out loud. She was angry. "Hat, if you speak the word Slytherin out loud, it will be the last thing you ever speak as I will throw you to the ground and give you a thorough cleaning with a Fireball hex and then Vanish the ashes; not to mention that I will then go sit at the Gryffindor table anyway!" When the hat did not immediately say anything, she pulled her hand down.

As she did, she heard a chuckle and realized it was the hat laughing. When it settled down, it said, "Now that's something Godric would have said." It then shouted "Gryffindor!"

She smugly took the hat off, walked by an astonished looking McGonagall, and sat by Harry. Her friend and her brothers welcomed her to the house. Harry also patted her on the back, which she was thrilled with. She would take any sign of friendship she could get from him.

While she was eating, she listened to the conversations going on around her, but her mind was really going over her plans now that she was at school. Ravenclaw's Diadem would be easy to get now. Tomorrow morning, she would capture "Scabbers" and take him to Dumbledore. That would free Sirius, who would be able to help her get the cup and locket. She would almost certainly have to take him into her confidence, but an oath of some sort would ensure his silence. Once those were destroyed, all she had to do was to let a Dementor kiss Harry's forehead on the train next September and remove the last Horcrux. Voldemort would be mortal at that point, and

as soon as he was not in a host, he should dissipate and die. At worst, any stray mortally wounding curse would take him out.

It was relatively easy, so why was she uncomfortable with the plan? She had gone over it multiple times since she had returned, and she could not figure out why something was nagging her. She looked at Harry and considered how she was going to talk him into letting a Dementor get near him. Perhaps Sirius could help her, she considered.

Then it hit her like a ton of bricks: if she altered the timeline such that Sirius was released before next year, then the Dementors would not be around and she could not use one of those to remove the soul fragment from Harry. She wanted to bang her head on the table for missing that for so long.

The alternative was to do what they did last time, but the ritual they had used was hard to do and a few of the potion ingredients were very hard to find. It had taken them over a year to get all of the ingredients, and that was with a half dozen people looking and a lot of Galleons changing hands.

As she listened to the boys talk about Quidditch while they all finished eating, she considered what to do. Unfortunately, the only thing she could come up with was to leave Sirius in prison for the extra year, and hope he would escape like last time, and that Fudge would again send Dementors everywhere looking for him. Then after the train ride next year, continue on with her plan of capturing Scabbers/Pettigrew and having Sirius help her retrieve the last two Horcruxes. Harry could destroy those and that would have to count as 'by his hand'. She wondered if she would have to share the prophecy with him or not.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the Headmaster as he gave the announcements for the term. They were the usual ones: the Forbidden Forest is forbidden, blah, blah, blah. They were soon dismissed and she followed her brother, Percy, up to Gryffindor Tower. Malfoy gave her a glare on the way out of the Great Hall, but she only laughed at him, which made him glare at her even more.

In her dorm room, she had the same bed as last time. Getting ready for bed, she saw the two lead boxes in her trunk, right next to a letter she had written a few days ago. She would get up early and destroy the Horcruxes after she mailed the letter. At worst, the letter would be ignored; at best, the letter would start the process to right some wrongs. She expected somewhere near the worst, that only one or two wrongs would be fixed.

Crawling into bed, she considered what the Sorting Hat had said. Yes, she was acting like a Slytherin in many ways, but she was going to take care of this like a Gryffindor: forcing what needed to happen.

The next morning, Ginny entered the Great Hall in fine spirits for breakfast. She had already visited the Owlery and the Room of Requirement.

In the second location, she envisioned a room to hide things and retrieved Ravenclaw's Diadem. As she was leaving, she saw a cabinet like a coffin. Remembering what Malfoy had done with it in Harry's sixth year, she blasted it into many little pieces. Going back out into the hallway, she caused the special room to create a different place.

Now, the room had created a long thin inner room of firebricks with a small steel door at one end. Opening the small steel door at the end of the inner room, she had levitated the two small lead boxes that had been in her trunk to the other end of the inner room. Then she cast a transfiguration spell at each box. The lead changed into paper, and she felt a slight pull from the diary, but she was easily able to ignore it at this distance. The diadem was also sent to the other end too. Finally, she carefully concentrated and cast a FiendFyre Spell at the Horcruxes. Before it hit them, she slammed the steel door shut and watched it with her wand ready to cast a fire shield.

A moment later, something hit the door on the inside. As it started turning a dull red, she cast a water conjuring spell and cooled the door down, ignoring the steam that came off the door. The door did not heat up again, but she waited another fifteen minutes anyway. After that time was up, she carefully opened the steel door and, thankfully, saw that the fire spell had ended. Looking at the other end,

she only saw three piles of ash. Pleased with the results, she Vanished the ash and left for breakfast.

While breakfast was being eaten, Ginny received her timetable. Looking it over, she found that she had History of Magic first. Rolling her eyes at the stupid class, she thought about what she should do in there. Writing a letter to her mother seemed like a good thing. Her mother would be thrilled to know she was in Gryffindor.

While Ginny was heading off for her first class of the day, Amelia Bones, Director of the Magical Law Enforcement was looking over the new memos and letters from last night. She hated the paperwork and wondered yet again why she had wanted this job. She had been reasonably happy with the job of Sr Auror. There, she felt like she made a difference every day; here, she was not always sure she did.

Picking up a memo marked "URGENT", she started reading about the need to increase the Auror staffing levels. Two more had recently quit and they needed to be replaced. There were four new recruits that had just started Auror school, but that would not be enough to bring them back up to full capacity, and it would take three years for those new recruits to finish training. Her daily headache threatened to start as she considered how to get Minister Fudge to agree to hiring more Aurors. For the last few years, he had let her department staffing levels drop dramatically. The four new aurors in training were the first in six years.

The door to her office opened and her secretary came in and handed her a letter. "I'm sorry, Director, but this letter just came in. I've checked it for spells."

Amelia took the letter and thanked the young woman. After the door closed and she was alone again, she opened the letter to see what it was about. The small delay it would provide from her normal tedium was welcome. She put her monocle in place as she started reading.

Dear Director Bones,

I'm writing to you because I don't know who else to trust. I've come into some information that must be acted upon, but I know I can't do it myself.

The problem is that Lucius Malfoy is an active Death Eater, despite what he claimed years ago. As you probably know, he managed to get out of that charge by claiming he was acting under the Imperius Curse. The truth, I've found, is quite the opposite. You can prove this in a couple of ways.

Amelia sat up straighter and became very interested in this letter. Auror staffing levels and Minister Fudge would have to wait.

You should search the Malfoy house for Dark objects. If you look everywhere, you'll find several that carry long sentences in Azkaban, and that no one other than a Death Eater should have. I would not be surprised for you to find a white mask and a special dark cloak too. Attire which no normal person should have, especially if he is trying to show he's innocent. Be sure you search the dining room floor carefully. I understand the trapdoor there is very well hidden. You should also hurry, as I've heard that he's trying to sell of some of these illegal items.

The second way to prove his guilt is with Veritaserum. I know you have strict policies on when you can use it, but I recall that being a "hostile witness" is one of the triggers that allows you to use it. You'll obviously want to ask him about being a Death Eater, because as I understand it, receiving the Dark Mark must be done willingly; the spell/curse does not "take" if forced upon someone.

Amelia almost dropped her monocle as she read that last part; it was news to her.

You should also be able to label him a "hostile witness" because he has unduly influenced the court. He won't testify, but I have a friend who has seen Lucius Malfoy talking to Minister Fudge, shake his robes which made the sound of Galleons clanking together, then a moment later, the clanking sound came from Minister Fudge's robes. This is but one of many examples of bribery that I am aware of, but

unfortunately am unable to prove. Hopefully, it will be enough for you to question Malfoy so that he has to answer.

By the way, did you know that Minister Fudge has a villa on the southern coast of France that he did not inherit and costs more than he's made in all the years of his service with the Ministry? You might want to ask Malfoy and Minister Fudge about that too.

A Concerned Citizen

Amelia was almost breathless after reading that. To be sure she was not imagining things, she reread the letter. It said the same thing the second time. Here was a way she could make a difference today. She wondered who the writer was and how he or she knew these things. The tricky part was determining if she could act on this. Anyone could write anything in a letter and send it to her anonymously. But it had the feel of truth about it.

She considered her options carefully. After a few minutes, she had her secretary send for her most senior Auror. Ten minutes later, there was a knock on her door and Alastor Moody walked in.

"You wanted to see me, Director?"

"Yes, Alastor. Please come in and have a seat." When he was sitting, she pulled out her wand and cast multiple silencing spells around the room. "Now, I have a very delicate project for you, Alastor, and it must be done with the utmost of secrecy until we have our evidence."

"Yes, Director?" He looked very curious after that introduction.

"I want four Aurors in the lobby. They are to check our records to see if Lucius Malfoy is in the building. If he is, they are to ensure that he does not leave. They are to be courteous, but they are to relieve him of his wand and escort him to a waiting room."

The old Auror grinned. "So Lucius is about to get what he deserves?"

"Maybe." She returned his grin. "If he comes into the building after you establish control of the lobby, in addition to the previous order,

you are to have at least one other person you trust with your life to follow him under an invisibility cloak and with a recording spell going. I want to know what he does within this building, as he is a citizen and not a ministry employee.”

“Can I use Shackbolt for the observation?” She nodded. “And if he’s already here, can I have him sought out and his actions recorded?”

Bones considered that. “If it can be done and him be none the wiser, that’s fine. While that is being done, I want you to take two squads and Arthur Weasley to Malfoy Manor. Weasley is supposed to be good at finding things. I’ll also arrange for an Unspeakable from the research department to join you. There are supposed to be some very Dark objects there. You and at least two others will take up command in the dining room and you will not move from there until I join you.”

“What’s so important about the dining room?” the gravelly voice asked, not missing the implication.

“I’m told there is a secret trapdoor there. Any place that is so secret will probably hold the most dangerous things, so if you find said door, mark it, but don’t open it. We’ll deal very carefully with it.”

“Anything else, Director?”

“I want this one badly, Alastor. Explain to everyone that it will be done by the book. I don’t want Malfoy to walk because someone did something stupid. With the possible exception of Shackbolt, because of the nature of his mission and he’ll have a recording spell to back him up, no one is by himself. Everyone will be partnered so no mistakes are made. Everything is double-checked before anything is done. Am I crystal clear?”

“Perfectly, Director. No mistakes allowed.” His gnarled face grinned as he got up. “Don’t worry, if it’s there to be found, we’ll find it.” He stumped out to start the missions.

Amelia Bones smiled. It was a good day to be an Auror. She hastily filled out a form and then rechecked it before she went through her

Floo to visit Hogwarts. She needed another signature on it and knew the Chief of the Wizengamot would help her.

Twenty minutes later, she had a signed form and was in the lobby of the Ministry. Searching, she spotted Dawlish and walked over to him. "Report."

"He's in the building, Director. We won't let him leave."

She nodded. "Remember, be courteous, but also be cautious. His wand is in the end of his cane, so tell him to let it drop to the ground and move away. If he tries anything at all, Stun him first and I'll ask questions later."

"Yes, Director. You can count on us."

"Very good, carry on." She walked to the Apparation point and a few seconds later, she was standing in front of Malfoy Manor. An Auror was at the front door.

"Good morning, Director."

"Good morning, Auror Devon. Where might I find the Sr Auror?"

"He's in the dining room, ma'am. Down that hall and take a right."

"Thank you, carry on." She took the directions given and quickly found Moody and his group. "Report."

"The house is secure. It was empty except for three house-elves. They are being watched. I have an Auror at every outside door and two watching the Floo. Three squads of two are searching the house now. I can tell you there is a trap door over there." He pointed to a spot just in front of the Unspeakable, who was casting revealing spells on the floor. "None of the searchers have reported back yet."

"Excellent. Please take someone with you and use your special eye to search for more hidden areas." Amelia looked around the room and saw nothing special, so she walked over to the now not-so-hidden trapdoor.

"I need a few more minutes," the deep voice of the Unspeakable told her. She nodded and took a few steps back. There was no need to get in the way.

Just before the Unspeakable opened the trapdoor, one of the search teams returned. They were empty handed, but Amelia was not concerned – yet. When the trapdoor was opened, the Unspeakable went down. She sent the two searchers down with him. After a few minutes, she went down too – not being able to stand the wait. She found she was in a good sized room with several smaller rooms off the main one. The smaller rooms looked like prison cells. Fortunately, they were all empty. Turning around, she saw a black cloak and a white mask next to the stairs going back up. She smiled, more hopeful now.

The Unspeakable was walking around the room. When he noticed her, he smiled too. "You've hit the jackpot, Director. I've already found three items that are each worth ten years in Azkaban, and that does not count that white mask by the stairs. There's also a filing cabinet over here that you'll want to go through very carefully. Be aware, there is a trap on it, probably to destroy the contents if opened incorrectly. Oh, what's this? Phials of memories. I wonder what he did not want anyone else to see? Yes, definitely the jackpot."

Amelia smiled again and went back upstairs. Moody was back.

"We found a few illegal wands and books. They carry a stiff fine, but they probably won't hurt the git too much," Moody reported.

"Go downstairs and help there, Alastor. The Unspeakable says we've hit the jackpot." A gruff laugh escaped the man. "You're in charge here. No mistakes, Alastor."

"No mistakes, Director."

With a spring in her step, Amelia Bones returned to the Ministry. As she Apparated in, she found the lobby in chaos. Drawing her wand, she walked towards the guard station. There she found one Auror

tending another on the ground, and Lucius Malfoy splayed and unconscious with his wand out of his cane.

“Director.” She turned to face Dawlish, who still had his wand out. “He drew his wand after we asked him to drop his cane. You just missed it all.”

“And Davidson?” She looked at the man who was down.

“He took a cutting curse to the shoulder, Director. I think he’ll be as good as new in a day or two. We have a healer on the way. Sr Auror Shacklebolt is waiting for you in your office.”

Bones picked up Malfoy’s wand and cane. “Put him in a holding cell after you search him for Portkeys and anything else he might use to escape or any potions.”

“Of course, Director. By the book.”

“By the book, Auror Dawlish. Carry on.” She was curious to see if Shacklebolt had gotten lucky. She would also have to send more help to Alastor. She wanted to know what was in those files. And where was Narcissa Malfoy, she wondered.

Amelia Bones was very proud of her department. In the last six hours, they had gone over the secret room in Malfoy manor with a fine-toothed comb. While they had found enough Dark objects to put Malfoy away for at least fifty years, the real find was the filing cabinet. After the Unspeakable had removed the protective ward on it, a team had gone over the contents of it. They now had enough evidence to arrest ten more men and add more time to a few already in Azkaban. Criminals who kept good records seemed illogical to her, but she welcomed them.

Albus Dumbledore banged the full Wizengamot into session as most people were sitting down to dinner. “I call for order, the Wizengamot is now in session.” It quieted down.

Amelia looked over at Fudge, who showed confusion on why there was a meeting of the full Wizengamot on such a short notice.

“Bring in the accused,” Dumbledore ordered. Two Aurors brought in a struggling Lucius Malfoy, forcing him to the witness chair, where chains wrapped themselves around the man. Amelia noticed that Minister Fudge paled significantly, and that warmed her heart, although she did not show it.

“Let the record show that this trial is for Lucius Malfoy, and he is accompanied by...” Dumbledore looked at the man near the witness chair.

“Dinglebirt, Arthur Dinglebirt”.

“Mr Malfoy is represented by Mr Dinglebirt.” Dumbledore looked back to the prisoner. “Lucius Malfoy. You are charged with: being a member of an illegal organization known as the Death Eaters, eight counts of murder, the owner of nine illegal magical items, and fifty-seven counts of bribery. How do you plead?”

Bones saw Fudge waver, as if he was going to pass out on the last charge. She smiled as he should be worried.

“Not guilty,” Dinglebirt announced.

“Why are we doing this, Dumbledore? Lucius is an upstanding citizen.” Fudge had finally found his voice again, but Amelia knew he was about to be broken.

Dumbledore gave an irritating smile, or at least Amelia found it irritating most of the time, although she was enjoying it now as it was directed at Fudge. “Minister, the Aurors have found some interesting evidence. Mr Malfoy will be given the chance to defend himself, as the law allows. The law should not play favorites, should it?”

Fudge shook his head -- what choice did he have?

Dumbledore looked over to Amelia. “Director, I believe you will take the prosecution for this case?”

"Yes, Chief Warlock." Amelia opened the file in front of her and began. An hour later, the extra squad of Aurors she had stationed in courtroom ten arrested six members of the Wizengamot, plus the Minister for Magic. An hour after that, the trial was over and Lucius Malfoy was taken away to Azkaban by a squad of Aurors and two Dementors.

The next morning at Hogwarts, Ginny went to breakfast with Harry, Ron, and Hermione. She was thankful that Hermione so quickly accepted her presence, as she had last time. Ron was still a bit put out at her insistence at her including herself in their group, but she ignored his childishness, knowing that he would not lose that overnight. As long as he was making progress, she was happy.

As if scripted, the morning owls came in a few minutes after everyone had started to eat. An owl bringing the Daily Prophet landed in front of Hermione. Her need to stay informed benefited them all.

Hermione had barely opened the newspaper when she dropped it in a gasp. In fact, gasps were heard from all over the Great Hall.

Ginny looked around and saw that all of the professors, except for Dumbledore, had a look on their face that bordered on incredulity. She smirked to herself, sure that her letter had started something.

"Look at this," Hermione announced as she turned the paper around. In bold headlines, the newspaper announced, "Minister Fudge Arrested!" with a large subtitle of "Lucius Malfoy Given Life in Azkaban".

Ginny could not help it, a large smile spread across her face. It was as if Christmas had come early.

"What are you so happy about Ginny?" Hermione asked. "This is the Minister for Magic we're talking about. This will affect the whole government."

She had been caught, but Ginny did not care, as she had an easy out. "Malfoy has finally been punished for what we all know he's done.

That should take baby Malfoy down a peg or two. And if the rumors that my father has heard are true, about Malfoy bribing Fudge, then Fudge deserves it. Maybe we can now get a more honest government.”

“My sister has a point,” Ron commented between bites.

“Well, read it to us, Hermione,” Harry encouraged her.

Hermione shifted slightly to make herself more comfortable and began to read.

Minister Fudge Arrested! Lucius Malfoy Given Life in Azkaban

Late yesterday afternoon as many of you were starting dinner, a surprise session of the full Wizengamot was called. Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore presided. Struggling in his manacles between two Aurors, prominent citizen Lucius Malfoy was brought in for trial. Amelia Bones, Director of the MLE, personally led the prosecution against the defendant, who was charged with: being a member of an illegal organization known as the Death Eaters, eight counts of murder, the owner of nine illegal magical items, and fifty-seven counts of bribery. He pled not guilty.

Madam Bones brought forth evidence of true Death Eater attire, clothing which she said should not be in the defendant’s house if his story be being forced to act like a Death Eater in the last war with You-Know-Who was really true. The Dark Mark was also shown to be on the defendant’s arm, and this proved to her that he really was a Death Eater. Therefore, he had already lied to the court and should be considered a hostile witness and given Veritaserum. Her request was granted and then the fireworks began.

Lucius Malfoy confessed to being a Death Eater and willingly taking the Dark Mark. He also explained that the Dark Mark could only be taken by free will, so anyone with a Dark Mark chose to be a Death Eater. He also admitted to eight murders, six of them with the Killing Curse. Malfoy also admitted to over eighty counts of bribery, the

majority directed towards Minister Fudge. The largest bribe was a villa located on the south coast of France, worth over 200,000 Galleons. That was given when Fudge vouched for Malfoy in 1981 and allowed Malfoy to go free after he said he was under the Imperius Curse during the war.

After that shocker, Minister Fudge was arrested. Several members of the Wizengamot then called for a break, but Madam Bones requested one more piece of business be conducted first. When the Chief Warlock granted her request, she questioned Malfoy about who else was bribed. A few minutes later, six members of the Wizengamot were taken into custody, including Sr Undersecretary Delores Umbridge. It also came out that four other highly placed ministry workers were named and had been arrested earlier in the day, three of which also had the Dark Mark on their left forearm. Seven other citizens were also named as Death Eaters, and they have already been taken into custody for a full trial at a later date.

The Wizengamot took a short break and then reconvened to debate the fate of Lucius Malfoy. Less than an hour later, he was handed enough fines to deplete much of the speculated Malfoy fortune, and he was sentenced to multiple life sentences in Azkaban's high security section. Because of his bribery and effect on the government, there were calls for him to be given to the Dementors. The Wizengamot voted to take that measure up at their next normal meeting.

Before they disbanded for the night, the Wizengamot took up the question of the leadership of the Ministry of Magic. By unanimous vote, Cornelius Fudge was removed from his office. The names of Dumbledore and Bones were nominated to temporarily hold the office of Minister until elections could be held. Dumbledore immediately removed his name from consideration. After a short discussion, Madam Amelia Bones was elected to hold the temporary spot. She also vowed to continue to clean up the present Ministry.

When the session ended, neither Chief Warlock Dumbledore nor Minister Bones had a statement for us.

The other three looked at Hermione. "I'll take my previous statement back, now that I know more. With a Minister like that, I'm glad he's gone."

Ginny was beside herself in joy. She had thought she would have to send one letter out for each Death Eater, but by starting at the top and with some luck, it sounded like almost everyone on her list was taken care of. She would have to get the newspaper from Hermione and double-check who was caught by reading the other articles. She could send in letters on anyone who was missed. There was one in particular that no one would catch unless there was inside information, or knowledge from the future. She would have to send at least one more letter.

She also wondered what happened to Dobby and how all of this would affect his behavior in regards to Harry. She would have to watch closely and hopefully guard Harry without his knowing about it.

They all went off to class for the day. Ginny started with Herbology, then Charms, and finally Potions just before lunch. It was all quite boring and she was not sure how long she could take this. All of school would be boring, but this was stupid as she was not even having the enjoyment of being with Harry. That got her to thinking of a modification to her plan.

"Weasley!" Snape shouted at her.

Ginny came out of her thinking, the lecture for Potions was apparently over with.

"Since you can't pay attention, that's ten points from Gryffindor. If you don't make today's potion perfectly, you will have detention with me tonight," he threatened her.

She almost rolled her eyes at the thought. Her, mess up a potion to cure boils? Unlikely. She walked over to join Colin Creevey, as he did not have a partner yet.

"No, Miss Weasley, over here by yourself. I want to see what you can do." He pointed to a place near the front of the classroom, a

worktable where she would be surrounded by Slytherins. She did not need to be a seer to predict what was about to happen.

Working as quickly and carefully as she could, including putting a lid over her cauldron as much as possible so contaminants could not be thrown in, Ginny made her potion. Several times, Snape stood so close behind her, he was almost touching her; but she did not even let that bother her. Just as she was finishing, she heard a plop from something she had not seen thrown, and her cauldron started to foam. Out of self-defense, not knowing what it was going to do, she Vanished the contents without hesitation to prevent anyone from getting hurt.

"Hmm, nothing to hand in?" Snape asked innocently. "I'll be seeing you tonight immediately after dinner, Miss Weasley." All the Slytherins around her snickered.

Ginny was fuming. There was no way anyone could have managed to have put something into her cauldron unseen, unless it had been disillusioned first. Disillusionment was a seventh year spell, so that left only one person in the room -- besides her -- capable of doing that.

Everyone quickly packed up to head to lunch at the end of class, but Ginny purposely dropped her bag.

"Hurry up, Weasley, or I'll add another detention for your clumsiness," the professor sneered.

Ginny slung her bag over her left shoulder and double-checked that she was the last student in the room. She then carefully drew her wand and made sure her body blocked her action. "Professor, about that detention ... OBLIViate!" Her wand was now pointing at Snape and he was hit with a white spell from less than six feet away; he had not be able to dodge. As a blank look came over his face, she put her wand up and walked out of the classroom and up to lunch. "Greasy git," she muttered to herself once she was in the hallway. If he kept this up, she was going to have to do something about him too.

((A/N: Well, that should answer one of the most burning questions of who Ginny thinks she will have to share her secret with.))

Chapter 4 - Opportunities

Minister for Magic (pro tem) Amelia Bones sat in her old office for the second day of her new position. She saw no need to switch offices, as there was a chance she would have to move back in a couple of months. Besides, she was comfortable here and preferred the security of being surrounded by friends and colleagues who were Aurors.

For the second time in the last few days, her secretary opened the door mid-morning and handed her a nondescript envelope. There was nothing to indicate this letter was any different than many of the other letters she received, but she wondered about it considering the timing of the delivery. Considering what the first one had meant, to the Wizarding World and to her, she ignored her other work and opened it. She was pleased with her decision when she quickly glanced down at the last line.

Dear Minister Bones,

I thank you for taking my other letter seriously, and I appreciate all the work you and your department went through to bring justice to many of us who have been negatively affected by those you apprehended. It gives me hope. There is another situation I feel I must tell you about.

Amelia almost started to worry. The last letter had really shaken things up. What would this one bring?

Some years ago, a young Death Eater was captured and sent to Azkaban. The circumstances surrounding the story were big news. However, unbeknownst to anyone, the Death Eater's mother became sick and wanted to visit her son one last time. The father, although he helped to send his son to prison, still loved his son. Therefore, during the prison visit, they took a supply of Polyjuice Potion and the mother and son switched places. The harsh environment of Azkaban hastened the mother's decline and she soon died and was buried on the island. The switch was never discovered as Dementors only counted souls, not identities.

A shiver went down Amelia's spine. The idea was so simple. While most people would be checked for bringing in potions, Aurors and very senior officials could avoid it. She had corruption in her own department and she did not even know it. That incensed her. She returned to the letter.

The father kept his son safe, but he could not let him loose, as he is still a committed Death Eater. If you visit Barty Crouch Sr in his home, be sure you search for people under Invisibility Cloaks. Also, be wary of his house-elf, Winky. She is very protective of both of them.

I'm sure you want to know how I know all of this, but I'm sorry, I can't tell you. I'm also not sure you'd believe me even if I did. I can promise you that I am not a Death Eater. I'm just...

A concerned citizen who wants to see justice

Amelia put the letter down and thought about it. While she hoped it was not true, she could see the possibility for it. Barty was a broken man when he had to put his son into prison. She could easily see a man ignoring the law when forced to choose between his job and his family. But like the writer of this letter, she also felt that justice must be served, even when it hurt.

Based on the truthfulness of the first letter, she sent a request for Moody again. While she waited, she asked herself the question if she could do the right thing if it had been her sister Clarisse or her niece Susan. It was a very uncomfortable ten minute wait.

"You asked to see me, Minister?" Moody asked as he walked in.

"Alastor, for this meeting I am the Director and I have a job for you."

"Of course, Director," he replied with a grin.

Amelia let a small smile out. She liked the Sr Auror. He was like her and hated the politics of the office. The camaraderie and standing up for what was right was more important than stupid games. "I'm about to go see Dumbledore for another search request..."

"You got another letter?" He suddenly looked very interested.

"Yes I did," she confirmed. "I'm sad to admit it, but I believe this one to be true as well."

"What do you need me to do?"

"Take your best squad and visit the Crouch residence." One of his bushy eyebrows went up. "You are to search for Crouch Jr."

His reaction was immediate. "What?! He's supposed to be dead," he said incredulously.

Deciding it might be easier if he had the full background story, she handed him the letter and watched him read it. When he handed the letter back, she told him, "Take the warning seriously, Alaster. You don't need anymore artificial body parts."

His cackling laughter filled the office. "Yes, Director. Is thirty minutes enough time for you to get a signature?"

"It will be sufficient. Report back to me personally when you return."

"Do you think there will be any more letters, Director?" Moody looked at her only with his good eye. His magical one was looking behind him.

"I don't know, Alastor. It's amazing how knowledgeable this person is. I don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth, as the saying goes, but I do wonder about this person's motivations. Anyway, enough of my musings, you have job. Be on your way." She grabbed a search form and filled it out while her secretary tracked down Albus Dumbledore. It was signed and legal twenty-two minutes later.

The next morning, everyone read in the Daily Prophet about Barty Crouch Sr hiding his escaped son in his home, using his house-elf to care for him. The most amazing part was that he had kept his son under control with the Imperius Curse. Crouch Sr was sent to

Azkaban for life imprisonment. Crouch Jr was given to the Dementors. Minister Bones had insisted on the letter of the law, and escaped convicts were not supposed to have a second chance to escape.

Hermione put the newspaper down after reading that to them. With a thoughtful look on her face, she asked, "Where do you suppose this information is coming from?"

"Hu" Ron asked in the middle of a mouthful of eggs.

"That's disgusting, Ron. Are you ever going to learn to not speak with your mouth full of food?"

Ginny almost giggled. Apparently, Hermione had started to follow her lead of trying to reform Ron.

To his credit, Ron swallowed before he spoke this time. "Sorry, Hermione, but I got to eat quickly if I'm to finish breakfast before it's over." He dished some more eggs onto his plate as he talked. "But I still want to know what you mean."

"What I said," Hermione replied, obviously restraining herself from rolling her eyes. "It's interesting that all of this information is just now coming to light when most of it is really from the last war. So why is it coming out now and who do you suppose is supplying it?"

Ginny did not answer the question, but she redirected their focus. "Look at Malfoy. He's in a real snit." The other three looked at the Slytherin table.

Ron laughed but managed to keep his mouth shut while he did it.

Harry just smiled. "Couldn't have happened to a nicer person," he said in a fake congratulatory tone.

"Harry!" Several people around them looked their way at her admonishment, and Hermione looked down in embarrassment for calling attention to herself.

He just smiled at her. "Hermione, you know how he acts like he owns the place, especially when pointing out his father is on the school's Board of Governors and how his father will fix everything. Now we see how it's all been fixed and this shows that Malfoy does not own everything. He's a bully, just like my Muggle cousin." With that, Harry grabbed a piece of toast and left the table for his first class. His friends followed him.

As Harry reached the doorway, Malfoy came around the table and almost bumped into him. "Watch it, Potty! You're in my way."

Harry turned to him and laughed. "What's wrong, Malformed? You're dear daddy land himself in a spot of trouble and now he won't be able to bail you out?" Malfoy's sneer increased. "Maybe you won't have any parents now, just like me. Hey, I got some Muggle relatives that act just like you. Maybe you're related to them and can stay with them now."

Malfoy went for his wand as Harry's friends chuckled, but the Slytherin was stopped by an older voice. "Mr Malfoy, it would not be wise for you to pull your wand."

The blond boy looked up and paled slightly to see that he had been caught by the Headmaster. "But, but Professor. You should have heard what he said to me."

"Actually, I did, Mr Malfoy." He turned to look down upon the other student. "Mr Potter, I believe you owe Mr Malfoy an apology."

To Ginny's surprise, Harry did not immediately do as the Headmaster asked. Instead he looked up at the Headmaster and asked, "Sir, to apologize would mean that I did something or said something untrue. What exactly was untrue?"

"Your teasing him about not having any parents, would be untrue and unkind. I know you don't like people teasing you about that." The wizard's tone was grandfatherly, but it still held rebuke.

"I did say 'maybe', Headmaster. As for it being unkind, that might be true, but until Malfoy gives me about two dozen sincere apologies for doing the same thing to me, I don't see the need to apologize to him."

Ginny was impressed with that logic, and that Harry had the guts to say it now. This was more like sixth year Harry.

"Nevertheless, I insist on an apology, Mr Potter." The Headmaster did not back down.

Harry finally buckled, Ginny could see it happen. He was still twelve after all.

"Very well, since you insist ... I apologize." With that simple vague statement that was emotionally flat, Harry turned and walked away. The Headmaster stared after him with a very disappointed look on his face.

Ginny followed her friend. When they were away from the Headmaster, she quietly said, "Good show, Harry. The Headmaster is being stupid. You gave him a hollow victory."

An angry Harry looked at her. It was the sort of look she had only every seen in the other timeline and on a much older face. "Thanks, Ginny. It's good to know who your friends really are." She nodded and they split paths. It also occurred to her that the event they had just left had been a defining moment. She wondered if Harry could call Fawkes to him again, as he had done in the Chamber of Secrets. Somehow, she doubted it, and she was not sure how she felt about that.

As it happened, Ginny berated herself. She should have seen this coming and been better prepared for it. She had just been knocked to the ground on their way out of the Great Hall after dinner. Crabbe and Goyle were holding their wands on Ron and Hermione, while Malfoy had shoved Harry up against the wall. Harry appeared slightly dazed. He must have hit his head hard on the stone wall, she realized.

While Malfoy stupidly ignored her and casually pulled his wand out as he laughed, Ginny sprang to her feet. Trusting Ron and Hermione to take care of Crabbe and Goyle, she yanked the wand out of Malfoy's hand before he could train it on Harry. Reaching up with her other hand, she grabbed Malfoy's ear and twisted it, pulling him away from Harry and to the wall beside her friend. Hearing sounds behind her after a yelp from Malfoy, she hoped her friend and brother were protecting her back.

She shoved only the tip of Malfoy's wand into the end of his nose and watched him go cross-eyed as he tried to focus on his wand invading his own body. Leaning near his ear, she hissed, "You can guess what will happen if I continue to shove this wand another six inches, can't you, Malfoy?"

He did not say anything or move, but that was OK as it was a rhetorical question.

"This is your last warning, Malfoy. If you'll either treat us civilly or ignore us, you'll live. But if you do anything to me and my friends and someone gets hurt, I'll personally make sure that your father is the last Malfoy on this planet. If you try something and no one gets hurt, you can consider yourself lucky as I'll only use a castration spell on you."

The boy's eyes widened.

"But if anyone gets hurt, there won't be enough pieces of you left to bury." With her threat delivered, Ginny hurled the wand down the corridor and backed up slightly. As Malfoy relaxed, she quickly lunged forward and knelt him hard in the groin, causing him to collapse to the ground into a fetal position and groan.

A quick look showed Hermione and Ron each with a wand held on a big Slytherin. Looking at Harry, she could see that he was still a bit dazed looking, although he was looking at her. "Come on, Harry. I think Madam Pomfrey needs to take a look at you."

That seemed to bring him around. "Uh, no, that's OK, I'm fine."

Ginny smirked at him. He started to stumble as she pulled him away from the wall, as she had mentally predicted. "Yeah, sure you are, Harry. Come along, let me lead you to the Tower." Ginny put his arm around her shoulder to steady him and started walking off. She heard two other wands get thrown and running feet to catch up.

"Wow! That was amazing, Ginny!"

"Thanks, Ron. I didn't do anything special, just what had to be done." Harry's normal line seemed like the right one for the moment.

"What did you tell, Malfoy, Ginny? I saw you whispering to him," Hermione asked.

"I was inviting him to tea," she replied sarcastically. "What did you think I was saying to him? I told him he better not do it again or he'd be really sorry."

"But Ginny, you can't go around beating up people," Hermione objected. "You can't stoop to their level. You'll end up just like them."

Ginny could not help herself, she snorted. "Really, Hermione. That may sound like good logic, but I can tell you it's not. People like that only understand one language, their own. So you have to talk in their language to get them to understand. If you want to think of that as fighting fire with fire, be my guest. But if you want to know the real difference between us, it's that we do those things only as a last resort and regret having to do it. Those people enjoy doing those sorts of things."

"But..."

"Hermione, please don't argue with me right now. Instead, think about it for a few days, honestly debating both sides. Then if you still disagree with me, I'll discuss it, but now is really not the time."

"Er, Ginny? I don't think you're going the right way," her brother timidly told her.

Her first reaction would have been to bite his head off for that, but then again, she was back in “war Ginny mode” and probably did not look or act like a sweet little girl right now. She took a deep breath to calm herself down a little more and act like the little girl she supposedly was. “Harry? Are we on the right path to the Tower?” she softly asked.

He pulled his head up, having lowered it and trusting her shortly after they had started walking. “Yeah, this looks right.”

“There’s your answer, Ron. I think Mr Concussion needs to talk to someone.” Her brother did not reply to that, and Hermione was – thankfully – staying quiet.

A few minutes later, they were at the hospital wing. Ron opened the door so Ginny could lead Harry in. The nurse was right there and saw them come in.

“Put him in this bed. What happened?” she asked briskly.

“He was thrown against a wall and hit his head on the stone. I’m reasonably sure he’s got a concussion,” Ginny told the woman.

Pomfrey did diagnostic spells on the boy. “And how did he get thrown against a wall?” She stopped her work and looked at the three of them.

Ginny was the only one who could find her voice. “The usual for Harry ... trouble finds him even while he’s just walking down the corridor minding his own business. I separated them and brought Harry here.”

The nurse looked at her carefully before she coolly asked, “Will I be seeing anyone else here in a few minutes?”

“No, I wouldn’t expect it. Boys with big heads don’t like to acknowledge that little girls can tell them to go away and that they obeyed,” Ginny said with a straight face.

For the tiniest of moments, a smile graced the usually taciturn nurse. “Mr Potter does indeed have a concussion, therefore he will be

spending the night here. However, it is slight, so he should be joining you in the morning for breakfast. Please give him your good-byes and return to your common room. I need to get a potion for him.” She turned and quickly walked into her office.

“Night, Harry,” they all told him.

“Ginny?” Harry weakly called out. She walked over to his bedside. “Thanks for the help. You’re a friend.”

She could not help herself, she leaned over and placed a light kiss on his forehead. “Anything for you, Harry, because you were a friend first.” Her voice thick with emotion as she thought back to his rescue of her from the basilisk in the other timeline. “We’ll see you in the morning. Sleep well, Harry.” Doing her best to stay composed and not let the emotion of the moment overcome her, she turned and strode out of the hospital wing, leading her friends back to the Tower, not saying a word. Ginny went straight to bed, not trusting herself around anyone at that moment.

That reminded her that there was still a very large snake under the castle. She was going to have to deal with that soon.

Harry did join them for breakfast the next morning, looking no worse for his “little accident”. The four of them noticed that while Malfoy glared at them, he did leave them alone. Ginny hoped that would continue. If not, she might have to break her promise to “the old Hermione”. Of course, if Malfoy was dangerous enough on his own now, it would not be breaking her promise to make him “disappear”; it would be protecting her friends.

The Daily Prophet reported that Narcissa Malfoy had been cleared of all charges against her and released. Ginny was not sure whether to believe that was true or not, as Mrs Malfoy had committed some heinous crimes of her own during the war in the old timeline; but it was possible that at this time, she truly was innocent and the war had caused her to go bad. Ginny would have to trust Minister Bones, although that did not stop Ginny from watching to see what Mrs Malfoy did in the future.

Potions went well that day. Snape mostly left her alone and treated her like the rest of the Gryffindors, that is to say uncivilly. Actually, all her classes were going well and she hardly even had to try to make Outstanding grades. In fact, she had to purposefully make a few mistakes and not be the first person to do a spell in class so she did not stand out too much. Still, it was not hard to notice the occasional thoughtful glance given to her by her teachers.

She thought she was able to redirect some of those suspicions by spending a lot of time in the library. She did not spend quite as much time there as Hermione did, but she made sure it was noticed that she spent as much time there as most of the Ravenclaws. Usually, she just did general reading, trying to round out her education with things she did not know yet. She also worked on her plan.

Regarding school, she felt like enough time had past, since it was nearing the end of October, for the next step towards world domination. She mentally laughed at how her mind had changed her thought to the Muggle movie phrase. She wished she were older, and she and Harry could go to movies together again. She had liked those little escapes from the war in the other timeline.

Gathering her thoughts, she made her way to see her head-of-house. Her knock was answered seconds later by a very prim looking woman. She mused that this version of McGonagall had yet to learn to relax. But then, this version of McGonagall had yet to get to the point of relax or go insane from the war.

"Professor, may I have a few moments of your time?"

"Certainly, Miss Weasley. Come in." Ginny was directed to a leather chair. "Now, what can I help you with?"

"Professor, I'd like to discuss the possibility of jumping a year. I've already seen all the first year material, multiple times from my brothers."

Her teacher only raised one eyebrow. "I suppose that's not uncommon with younger siblings. It would be more true for you with

the number of brothers you have.” Ginny blushed slightly at that. “Are you bored in class?”

“Very.”

She nodded. “I had wondered. Class does seem to be very easy for you. I’ve already discussed that with some of the other Professors and they all agree that you are doing Outstanding work. The one exception can be ignored.” She gave a small smirk with the last part, which Ginny could not help but return. “Why did you want to do this now?”

“I thought that the sooner I did it, the better it would be, as the material is easier at the lower level. I thought that changing at the start of the new term in January would work well.”

“It is true that the sooner the jump is made, the easier it is.” McGonagall thought about it for a moment. “Miss Weasley, please do some transformations for me.”

Ginny followed her directions. They were all from her first year final exams, if she remembered correctly.

The professor nodded. “Very well done. I shall discuss this with the Headmaster. He will have the final say, besides your parents, of course.”

“Of course, Professor. I’ll write home and tell them so they won’t be surprised. Thank you for your time, Professor.” Ginny left and went back to the Tower. She felt she could talk her parents into this, but one never really knew sometimes.

Walking in, she saw Harry playing chess with Ron. That scene brought back a lot of happy memories. She walked over and watched them for a minute.

Ron made a move and then finally looked up at her. “Need something, Ginny?”

“Actually, yes. Harry, when you finish there, can I please talk to you for a few minutes?”

Her brother huffed. “Why is it always Harry you have to talk to or hang with?”

“Is your jealousy coming back, Ron?” she asked innocently, while noticing that Harry was staring intently at the chess board. Ron went red in the face, but he managed to hold his tongue. When she was sure he was not going to explode, she answered, “Because I need help with something only Harry can do. If I needed help with something only you could do, Ron, I’d ask you. And before you ask, it’s none of your business what I want to discuss with my friend. I’ll tell you later, but it will be when I want to tell you.”

That might have been a bit bossy of her, but she did not care at the moment. Ron irked her sometimes. She went upstairs and got parchment, her quill, and ink. After a quick letter to her parents explaining about her classes, she felt like drawing or doodling. That carefree activity would probably take her mind off of her brother.

She made herself comfortable in a chair by the fire. Her fingers and the sub-conscious parts of her brain seemed to work on their own. Mostly it was just shapes, but after awhile, she noticed that she had drawn a small snake on the page. Stopping to look at it carefully, she finally recognized where that image had come from: Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Her mind was obviously thinking about things to come.

“Nice picture,” came a voice from above. It was a voice she had not expected. She looked up into the dark eyes of Dean Thomas and smiled. A part of her was not really sure why she had dated him in the other timeline, and yet, she also knew he was a kind soul with lots of emotion and feeling within him.

“Thanks. I was just doodling. I’m not even sure where it came from.”

“I like the shading. It looks very realistic. Have you done any other pictures?” he asked.

“Not really. I tend to doodle more than draw.”

“Too bad,” he told her. “I see some real talent there.”

“Thanks.” She looked at him and almost laughed. This was much like the conversation that had started their relationship in her fifth year, except that Dean had continued it on with asking about them spending time together alone. Since he was twelve, she would have been very surprised had he done that this time. “It’s something I do when I’m bored, otherwise I don’t care about drawing.”

He nodded, as if understanding, but from what she knew about him from last time, she doubted he really did. She suspected he was just being friendly over a common interest.

“If you do any more, I’d like to see them.” He stood and walked off to join Seamus.

Looking over, she saw that Harry had finished his game and was walking over. She stood too so she could search the room. Finding a couple of empty chairs in the corner, she waved at him to follow her. When he joined her, she pulled out her wand and whispered an Imperturbable charm.

Harry cocked his head and raised an eyebrow at her. “That’s a fourth year spell.”

She smiled at him, as if he was a clueless child. “I come from a Pureblood family with lots of older brothers. I was bound to pick up some very useful things before I came to school.” When he frowned at her, she quickly realized what the problem was – probably. “Harry, I’m not one of those who believe in the purity of magical blood. I’m very equal opportunity and believe in the skill of the magic user. It would have been more correct for me to say that I came from a Wizarding home where I had lots of opportunity to see and pick up magic skills before I started school. Is that better?”

One of his shy smiles, that almost melted her heart, graced his face. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you feel bad. I really should have known you wouldn’t be that way.”

Ginny smiled back. "I know, Harry, and you didn't make me feel bad."

"Thanks." He looked at her hesitantly for some reason. "So, uh, what did you want to talk about?"

A devilish grin came over her. "I have a proposition for you." As she had hoped, he blushed very red, which made her laugh. "Sorry, Harry, but you're just too easy to tease." He lightly backhanded her shoulder, as she'd seen him do with Ron. "Anyway, I have a business proposal for you, for someone with your unique skills. It will also allow me to repay your loan to me."

He gave her a confused look. "Like what?"

She pulled out her drawing and showed him the picture. "Harry, concentrate on the drawing of the snake and tell him to open up." He looked at her like she was crazy. "Just humor me, Harry."

Harry shrugged and did so. Out came hissing instead of English. "And?" he asked her.

"That is your unique skill, Harry. You can speak Parseltongue."

"I thought you said I shouldn't do that."

"I said," looking as if it should have been obvious, "that you should not let that become publically known. But I think I've found a treasure that is accessible only to someone who knows Parseltongue. So with my knowledge to get there, your ability to open the door, and the Headmaster's ability to sell the treasure off, then we'll all be rich." She flashed him a big smile, which he mimicked.

"Seriously?"

"Yes. I have yet to ask the Headmaster, but I was thinking about splitting it forty-forty-twenty with the school, me, and you. How he uses the forty percent to help the school, is up to him and the Board of Governors. Twenty percent is for you and your unique ability, and remaining forty percent is for me and my family for finding the thing in the first place as well as knowing what we'll be facing."

His look changed to one of concern. "What do you mean, facing? What is guarding the treasure?"

"Actually, the guard is the treasure. We'll carve him up to his components and sell it all off for potion ingredients." When he still looked at her expectantly, she calmly said, "It's a thousand year-old basilisk."

Harry almost fell out of his chair. "You're joking, right?"

"No, Harry. Well, at least I don't think so." She acted a bit unsure, as that was required. From his point of view, how could she really 'know'? "I mean, one can never be completely sure what's hidden until one finds it; but all the clues point to that."

"And you think the Headmaster will agree to that?" he asked.

"He won't have a choice, as he searched for this place once before and didn't find it. Besides, even forty percent of several hundred thousand Galleons is a lot of money, especially when it's for doing almost nothing."

Harry shook his head as if he still could not believe it. "Well, if you can talk him into it, I'm in."

"Good!" Just because the situation allowed for it, she threw herself at him and gave him a hug. It felt so nice, she had to force herself to let go. "Sorry," she muttered and looked down with false embarrassment. "The Headmaster should call me into his office in a day or two for something else. I'll bring you along and we can talk about it with him then."

She got a meek "OK". Ginny told him good-night and took her spell down. Her plans were going well and she was cementing her relationship with Harry. She really hoped nothing went wrong.

((A/N: A number of people have commented on the fact that some of Ginny's actions have caused bigger ripples than she's presently aware of, or thinking about. Don't worry, they will catch up to her. :-))

Chapter 5 - A Contract and a Club

Three days later, fate played a cruel trick on Ginny, or it else handed her present; Ginny was not sure which, but decided to treat it like a present. Professor McGonagall had told her after class that the Headmaster wanted to talk with her after dinner tonight, but when she made it back to the common room, it was to see everyone crowded around the bulletin board. There was a notice everyone was talking about.

"Hey, Harry," Ginny called out when she saw him.

He turned around all smiles. "Hey, Ginny. Did you see the notice? There's going to be a Dueling Club. It's meeting tonight in the Great Hall after dinner."

Ginny closed her eyes and slowly counted to five. When she opened them, she saw Harry looking at her strangely.

"Who do you suppose will be teaching it," her brother asked as he walked up with their other friend.

"I heard Professor Flitwick used to be a Dueling champion," Hermione informed them.

Ginny debated with herself momentarily on what to do, and hoped she was about to do the right thing. "I heard it will be run by Lockhart and Snape."

Harry's distaste was immediately obvious, not that she could blame him. Ron did not seem so thrilled now either. Only Hermione still seemed excited to go.

As her brother and other female friend looked at each other and started to bicker over whether they should go or not, Ginny tugged on Harry's sleeve and pulled him to the side. "Harry," she whispered. "My meeting with Dumbledore is tonight after dinner. Will you please come with me? I think this would be a good time to ask him about getting the treasure."

Harry looked torn about what to do, so Ginny gave him her best smile and puppy-dog eyes. He blushed and looked down. "OK," he finally told her.

She took it as a good sign that she could so easily change his mind. "Thanks, Harry. I promise you won't regret it." Glancing over to see that her brother and Hermione were still bickering, she added conspiratorially, "You'll get to learn a secret about me before they do too."

He raised his eyebrow to give her a questioning look.

"Sorry, you'll have to wait until tonight," she told him with a teasing smile.

"What are you two talking about?" Ron asked, joining them again. Hermione was right beside him.

"Oh, uh, Harry and I have a meeting with the Headmaster to discuss a few things about school, so we won't be going to the Club meeting with you," Ginny explained.

"Harry! You can't leave me like this. You have to come too." Ron stared at his friend, as if unable to believe what he was hearing.

"Yeah, Harry," Hermione chimed in. "I thought for certain you'd want to go."

"Well," he paused and looked at Ginny. "That was before I heard that Lockhart and Snape were running it. With those two, something bad is bound to happen. You know how it is with me and my luck," he joked, but his two friends did not go for it.

"What's your meeting about?" Hermione asked.

Harry looked to Ginny, who answered. "Sorry, you'll have to wait until afterwards. Besides," she tried to get the focus off of her, "it's Lockhart. You know how bad a teacher he is."

“Ginny,” Hermione huffed. “I don’t understand why you have such a problem with him. Look at all the stuff he’s done in his books.”

“And look how he’s lied in them too,” Ginny countered. “Look at the dates. He’s been in two places at once.” She really wished Remus as around. “And his stories on werewolves, they’re impossible, Hermione. He claims to have held a werewolf down with one hand while he cast a spell to cure it. Both of those things are impossible. Werewolves are far too strong to be held down with one hand; and if he really had a cure, then we shouldn’t have any more werewolves. Ministries from all over the world would be at his doorstep asking for the cure.”

“I still think someone has a crush on him,” Harry said in a loud whisper to Ron.

“I do not,” Hermione loudly protested and blushed at the same time.

Ginny led the laughter of the other three. “Right,” she drawled. “Anyway, it’s time for dinner, let’s go.”

Off to dinner they went. All throughout the meal, Ginny noticed Harry glancing at her and then looking away when she looked up, as if he was trying to observe her without her noticing. She wondered what it was about, but did not really have a clue. Ginny knew what she would like it to mean, but Harry was only twelve and still clueless about girls. Although if her plan worked, it would not be Cho who started cluing him in about girls.

When dinner ended, about two-thirds of the students stayed, including Hermione. Ron decided to go back to their common room, saying he got enough of Snape during class. Ginny just shrugged as she and Harry left to go meet the Headmaster.

Harry was still glancing at her from time to time. Ginny was starting to wonder if maybe he was only trying to guess what her secret was, but she really did not know. When they came to the gargoyle guarding the Headmaster’s office, she gave the password Professor McGonagall had given her. She had barely knocked when she heard “Enter” from inside the office.

As they walked in, she heard, "Welcome, Miss Weasley. Mr Potter, this is a surprise. Would either of you care for a lemon drop?" When they both turned him down, the Headmaster looked at her for an explanation.

"Headmaster, I hope you don't mind, but I asked Harry to join me because we have some school business to talk to you about. I also wasn't worried about Harry hearing the answer to my request, since he would hear about it shortly anyway," Ginny explained.

A smile seeped through the old wizard's white beard. "I see. Very well, Miss Weasley, if that is what you wish. For your request, while it is unusual, all of your teachers, except for one, agree that you should be able to do this. That one teacher says that your work in his class is merely acceptable, but with enough hard work on your part, you have a small chance of success."

Ginny gave him a large grin, purposefully ignoring the report of her biased Potions teacher.

"After speaking with your parents, we have agreed to let you join the second year classes at the beginning of the spring term, as you have requested." He bowed his head slightly in acknowledgement and congratulations.

She turned and looked at Harry, who was looking at her dumbfounded.

"Well, say something, Harry."

"I... Uh, that's... Wow! Congratulations, Ginny," he finally got out. "So, you'll be joining us in our classes?"

Ginny could not help but give a giddy chuckle, which came out like a cross between a chuckle and a giggle. "Yep. I've been so bored in my classes, I thought this would be a good way to make them more challenging." She left out the fact that with a little revising, she could probably take her OWLs and make Outstanding scores. With a lot of

revising to remember the theory, she could even pass her NEWTs. She could do her practicals right now, if need be.

Harry looked at her for a few seconds, and then he started laughing.

“What?” she asked.

When he settled down, he said, “I can’t wait to see the reaction from Hermione and Ron. You’re going to tell them tonight?”

She nodded.

“You don’t have to do this, but I think it might be better for you to wait until Christmas break, you know, after our final exams for the term,” he suggested.

That insight surprised her.

“Mr Potter has a point, Miss Weasley,” the Headmaster said. “This would be much more natural after your exams.”

“I’ll consider it, sir.” Ginny turned to her friend. “Thanks, Harry.”

“No problem,” he told her as he shrugged.

“Now, Miss Weasley. What is this other business you wanted to discuss?” The Headmaster serenely looked at her.

“Headmaster, I’d like to present you an opportunity to make some extra money for the school.” Ginny pulled out a rolled parchment and handed it to Dumbledore. “I assume that you and the school’s Board of Governors could use the money to better the school in some way. For example, I would consider the brooms the first years use in their introductory flying classes to be unsafe and needing to be replaced.”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled as he unrolled the parchment and began reading.

Ginny saw Harry look at the short document and then look at her questioningly. "I figured this was the easiest way to present the issue." He shrugged.

A couple of minutes later, the Headmaster put the document down. "So, Miss Weasley. You believe you know where a hidden treasure is here at the school, and you're offering the school forty percent of the profit after selling it, with another forty percent for yourself, and twenty percent to Mr Potter. There are a few other minor conditions, such as you wanting enough of the material to make two full adult-sized garments, including cloaks, and you want to oversee the 'harvesting' to verify what is being sold. This last part is to ensure nothing disappears and you don't see all of the profits you're entitled to, I presume?"

"That is correct, Headmaster," she answered, also giving him a firm nod.

"It is all very straight forward, although quite vague on some important details. My first question to you is why Hogwarts should pay you anything for this treasure when it is on Hogwarts property?" Dumbledore folded his hands and leaned back in his chair, waiting calmly. He looked to be treating this as a 'get rich quick scheme.'

"Because, Headmaster. Without me telling you where it is, you'll never find it. And before you ask, I do know that you've searched for it before and failed to find it. One could also say that the treasure is not really on Hogwarts property, but it is easiest to get to it from Hogwarts." Ginny replied just as calmly.

"I see. And where, exactly is this treasure?" Dumbledore looked very curious.

"It's in the Chamber of Secrets, Professor."

That simple statement caused the Headmaster to suddenly sit up very straight. "Miss Weasley. Are you trying to tell me you've found this mythical place?"

“Yes. With the proper research, it wasn’t all that hard. You could have found the entrance to it if you had tried harder fifty years ago.” It was all she could do to keep the smile off of her face when she saw his shocked look. A glance to the side showed Harry to be amused and enjoying “the show”.

“Miss Weasley. There is no evidence that it really exists. The story of the mythical place conveniently matched the tragic circumstances of approximately fifty years ago, but the Chamber need not really exist. I and many others searched for it and it has never been found. The circumstances surrounding that unfortunate time have been explained. Why do you think you’ve found it?” Dumbledore leaned forward a little more, his eagerness to hear her answer obvious.

“Because I have, and I won’t answer more on where to find it until that contract is signed.” Dumbledore looked disappointed. “And given enough time, you might actually find the entrance, but you won’t be able to open it without Harry. That’s why he is part of the team. Only he and Tom Riddle can open it.”

“I wondered at Mr Potter’s involvement.”

“He has the necessary, uh, skill to enable us to get to the treasure. You could ask Riddle, but I don’t think he’d be too cooperative, assuming you could track him down,” Ginny said with a grin. At Dumbledore’s surprised look, she added. “And Headmaster, this will also mean that you owe a certain former student an apology and the Ministry owes him a new wand.”

“Because?” Dumbledore was making her spell it out. Why, Ginny did not know.

“Because Hagrid is innocent. He was framed by a very clever and ambitious Slytherin. In fact, the person who really committed the crime is the last of the Slytherin line, according to my research.” At the Headmaster’s surprised look, she tacked on, “Yes, I was also able to figure out who Tom Riddle really is.”

“My I ask how you did that?” He had a piercing look on his face that made Ginny glad she had her necklace on.

“Lot of research. You can ask Madam Pince if you like, and she’ll tell you that I’ve spent a lot of my extra time in the library.” Ginny was not surprised at his answer.

“I am aware of that. I believe that only Miss Granger has spent more time in there than you have.” His twinkle was back in his eyes. “So, you know where the treasure is and how to get to it. What is the treasure that’s worth so much?”

Ginny purposefully waited a few extra seconds to let the anticipation build. “How much would you say we could make off of potions ingredients from a thousand year-old basilisk?”

For the first time in her life, in both timelines, Ginny saw Albus Dumbledore with a shocked expression. “Are you serious, Miss Weasley? Here, at this school?”

She grinned and barely refrained from saying ‘as serious as a heart attack’. She could not let that much of ‘Older Ginny’ out. “My guess is that Salazar Slytherin put it there just before he left the school. The school is a little over a thousand years old, so yes, I’m serious. I would guess it would be about fifty to sixty feet in length. It would be bigger, but it’s probably had to hibernate much of its time to survive this long.”

“Amazing...” Dumbledore leaned back in his chair and considered what she had told him.

“So, do we have a deal, Professor?” Ginny waited patiently, she had the time. Looking at Harry, he seemed fine with waiting too. There was a smirk on his face, from watching the conversation she assumed.

Eventually, Dumbledore seemed to come to a decision. “You seem to treat the King of Serpents very lightly, Miss Weasley. They are quite difficult to kill.”

“As my brother Bill, says, traps are only hard when you don’t know where they are and you don’t know what they are – otherwise, they’re

only tedious. I don't know that I'd want to try it, being only a first year, but the book in the library was quite specific on how to kill one. I think it would be very easy for you Professor, since you know what to you're going to have to do before you get there." She looked at him, mentally throwing the argument back.

"I assume you mean in making a rooster crow?" he asked.

"Yes, Professor."

Dumbledore nodded, before thinking for another long moment. "I see what you mean by 'harvest' in the contract. How did you plan for that to occur?"

"You have staff who can do at least part of it. Harry and I can help a little, in addition to double-checking the harvest. If required, we could also hire the work done, but that would decrease our profits." She stated the obvious to see what the Headmaster would say.

"I see your point. We do have a Potion Master who could do much of the work," he offered.

"True, but if he does, I will also remind you of the clause in the contract that that says we have to approve who does the work, and if we desire, another person must be present and that person must meet our approval." Ginny became more serious. "While I will agree that Professor Snape does have the skill, if he does the work, we will require another adult to be present."

Dumbledore must have found that amusing because he smiled slightly. "Miss Weasley, Professor Snape has my full trust..."

"It is not your trust we question," Ginny interrupted the Headmaster. "We question what he would do with the opportunity and how he would treat us while we are down there. The extra adult, who we must approve, would be present to curb his barbaric behavior." That was a bit strong, but Ginny was not going to back down. She had anticipated Snape's involvement.

"Miss Weasley! That is uncalled for," the Headmaster rebuked her.

Ginny did not miss a beat. "Headmaster, have you ever observed one of Professor Snape's classes when he did not know you were there?"

"No, Miss Weasley, I have no need to. I trust him completely," Dumbledore said with confidence.

"And how many complaints have you had about him over the years, Headmaster?" Ginny asked, a little softer, maneuvering in for the kill.

"Some, but all teachers gather complaints."

Ginny thought that was one of the most twisted truths she had ever heard. "But using simple math to calculate the average for each teacher, taking the total number of complaints divided by the number of years taught, isn't Professor Snape far and away the worst?"

"I believe the complaints against him are an anti-Slytherin bias. He is a superb Potions master," Dumbledore defended his employee.

Ginny skipped his ignoring of her question and leaned forward to make her final point, speaking with fervor. "His Potion Mastery is not the reason for the complaints, Headmaster, as I'm sure you know. It's his inability to teach and his biased personality that is the problem. I would challenge you to observe all of his classes this coming Thursday morning without him seeing you. Don't tell him you'll be doing this and don't interrupt while you're there. After that, if you can honestly tell me that Professor McGonagall would act the same way and that he's only misunderstood as a Slytherin, I'll withdraw my objections. But I can tell you that my mother would say that he is a man who should not be around children."

Dumbledore smiled and leaned back in his chair. "While I could, Miss Weasley, why should I? Professor Snape has had his job for the last ten years, and I see no reason to change that."

"Because you owe it to the school and the students to see that the teachers you have here are the best teachers you can find. Because it's your job, Headmaster. Because if you really care about the

‘greater good’, then you’ll see if the good of many in the school is being harmed by your loyalty to one man.”

Ginny had done it, she had spoken her mind and felt good about it, but she also knew she had possibly just jeopardized the rest of her plan. No eleven year-old should know that much about how the world works and talk like that, but she did not care in the emotion of the moment. Most of her plan was in motion and could not be stopped. Three more major events and she would be done, but she also really wanted to do something about Snape. Just like Malfoy, Snape would be reformed or removed, one way or another -- if she could help it.

After some thought, Dumbledore said, “I’ll consider your statement and request. As for your contract, I’ll submit it to the Board of Governors. If they approve of it, I’ll sign it with them. Because if your age, one of your parents will have to sign as well.”

While not preferred, Ginny had expected that. She had already decided that her father would be the easiest to persuade. “I understand. If you don’t mind, I’d like to owl my father to visit me on Saturday to discuss this.”

“I will allow that. I will sign for Mr Potter,” Dumbledore said.

“Wait,” Harry spoke up for the first time since the negotiations had started. “Why would you sign for me?” he asked with a very confused tone.

For a brief second, Ginny wondered at the emotion that had flashed on the Headmaster’s face for the briefest of seconds; it had almost looked like fear. A glance at Harry showed her he had caught it too.

“Because you are underage, Mr Potter. Since you do not have a Wizarding guardian, I can sign for you as the Headmaster. You’ll need to sign it too, but my signature will show that an adult is looking out for you,” he said with confidence.

Harry’s face scrunched up slightly as he thought about that. “But who should really be my guardian? Did my parents name you as such?”

Bravo, Harry, Ginny thought, as she watched this play out. This was one more piece of information the Headmaster had keep hidden for too long in the other timeline, at least in her opinion.

“No, Mr Potter, but I do this for all students who do not have parents. There is nothing unusual about this,” he assured his student.

Bollocks, Ginny thought, as she tried to decide if she should step in.

“But, my parents must have written something down. I mean, I doubt I’m all that rich, but wouldn’t they have left some instructions?” Harry wondered out loud.

Ginny could not help herself and snorted – loudly.

Harry looked at her strangely.

“Sorry, Harry,” she told him. “I don’t know where your parents would have left their Will, but your family is old and well known. The Potters weren’t the wealthiest family, but they were quite, uh, comfortable, I guess you could say. Look at the size of your vault, Harry. That’s a trust vault not a family vault. What you know about is only a fraction of the Potter fortune.” As he looked at her in surprise and a little anger, she had to add, “It is common knowledge to everyone who grew up in the Wizarding world. I thought you knew.” That last part was sort of a lie, but she had to say it. Well, it was the truth as far as “New Ginny” was concerned. Only “Old Ginny’s” other timeline knowledge knew differently.

“Really?”

“Yes, really,” she answered quickly before Dumbledore could. “Perhaps Professor Dumbledore knows where their Will might be found or else who would know.” That was evil of her, but she enjoyed the predicament she had put the Headmaster in.

Harry turned to look at the old wizard. “Professor?”

He seemed to deflate. “I’m not really sure where their Will is, Harry. I took over guardianship for you when they died, as there was no one

else who could at the moment. In regard to the Potter fortune that Miss Weasley has brought up, I believe that it will come available to you on your seventeenth birthday. I would have told you before then, and it didn't seem to matter beforehand. I do care for you, lad."

That was very carefully worded, Ginny thought.

"Well, I believe that's enough for tonight," Dumbledore genially said. "I'll get back with you next week about this contract. Have a good evening, and thank you for giving up the time from the Dueling Club. I hope you can make the next meeting."

Harry and Ginny both nodded and rose to leave. A quick glance back showed the Headmaster to be looking very thoughtfully at her as they left the office. As they started walking back, each considered the conversation carefully.

In the corridor, Harry turned to his friend as they walked back. "Ginny..."

She placed a hand on his shoulder and stopped him. "Harry," she whispered, "the portraits can tell the Headmaster what they see and hear."

He looked at her with alarm and continued to walk without saying anything for a few minutes. As they past an unused classroom, Harry quickly pulled her into it. After looking around to make sure there were no portraits in it, he closed the door. "Can you do that charm again so no one can hear us?"

"You learn fast." She grinned at him and whispered the spell as she cast it around them. "What's so secret?" she asked innocently, having a good idea what was on his mind.

"Did you really mean all of that? You know, about the Potter family?" His eyes drilled into hers very seriously.

"Sure, Harry. Like I said, there's a lot about the Potters that's common knowledge, like there is about the Weasleys, the Longbottoms, the Bones, the Malfoys, and, well, you know, all the

well-known Wizard families. There's probably even a book in the library with information about your family." When he did not say anything for a moment, she continued. "You didn't really know, did you?" He shook his head. "That's why you do some of the things you do," she said as if suddenly understanding. "And that's why Malfoy makes fun of you sometimes. He can tell you don't know by how you act and what you say." She shook her head. "We've got to help you there, Harry."

"Duh," he blandly said. "OK, I can do some research, but what else?" He looked at her expectantly.

"We'll ask Dad when he comes to visit us. He'll have some ideas. He may even know who to ask about your family's Will." She smiled. "Yeah, Dad will probably know who to ask." She really did not know if he did or not, but her father knew a lot of things. Thinking back, she was not sure how Harry had come into knowledge about his family vault and other things in the old timeline; he had never told her.

"Thanks, Ginny! You're really a great friend." He looked like he wanted to hug her, but did not.

Ginny sighed at the 'near miss'. "Anytime, Harry, that's what friends are for. And," an evil grin lit her face, "think of the fun we can have with Dumbledore. He's obviously withholding information from you. I'm sure he'll say it's for your own good, or that it doesn't hurt you, but still, it's your life."

"Too bloody right," Harry said with conviction.

"Well, enough here. Let's go back and see what Hermione thought of the Club. I bet we'll be glad we skipped it," she told him with a grin.

"With the gits, Lockhart and Snape, in charge? No doubt, but yeah, she could have a good story for us," he said with a grin.

Ginny took down her charm and they returned to the Tower, talking of inconsequential things.

When they walked into the common room, it seemed a little louder than usual -- discussion about the Dueling Club, Ginny presumed. Harry touched her arm and pointed over to a couch. There sat Hermione in tears, surrounded by Lavender and Parvati, with Ron kneeling in front of her. They quickly went over.

"What happened?" Harry asked.

Only Ron looked up at him. "They just got back a few minutes ago. I've been trying to get the story out of her, but all she's does is cry."

Parvati backhanded Ron on the shoulder hard enough that he almost fell over. "Well, you'd cry too if it happened to you."

"Will you just tell me?" By the sound of his voice, Ron was getting frustrated.

"After a demonstration where Snape knocked Lockhart down," Lavender started, "they had us pair off and let us try a few things, but that really wasn't working out very well. So Snape decided to have a pair of students duel on the stage. He picked Malfoy and Lockhart picked Hermione."

"I bet that would have been me if I had been there," Harry muttered, probably not meaning to be heard, but everyone in the little group looked at him. He blushed just slightly but looked at their blonde classmate. "What happened next, Lavender?"

"Well, they were supposed to start on the count of three, but Malfoy shot a serpent summoning spell on the count of two. A huge black poisonous snake came and landed right in front of Hermione. While that was scary, Lockhart made it worse by blasting it into the air. When it came back down, still closer to Hermione, the snake was clearly mad and tried to bite her. It barely missed before Snape could get rid of the snake."

"The bloody bastard," Ron swore. It was an indication of how upset Hermione was that she only looked at Ron instead of admonishing him for his language.

Shaking her head, Ginny pushed past her brother and pulled Hermione into a hug. The older girl hugged back and held on tightly for a few minutes. "It's OK, Hermione, it'll be OK," Ginny softly told her friend. "Malfoy will get what's coming to him. You just ignore him and you'll be OK."

Eventually, Hermione let Ginny go and wiped her eyes with the back of her hands. "Thanks," she whispered to her friend.

"Go up and take a hot shower and go to bed early for once. We'll see you at breakfast." When Hermione did not move, Ginny grabbed her arm and pulled her up. "Go on," Ginny urged her and Hermione slowly complied. As soon as she was up the stairs, she turned to the two boys. "Follow me," she commanded in a voice that did not allow for disobedience as she walked over to an unoccupied corner.

She was not sure Ron could do this, but she had to give him the chance. "Ron, if I let you help us pull a prank, can you not give it away? Or do I need to get our other brothers?"

"You'd let me?" he squeaked in surprise.

"Only if you can do it without giving it away." She gave him her best stare to see if he would break. It did not take long for him to look away, but he did not start stuttering apologies or say anything else. "OK, if you're really in, be down here at six tomorrow morning."

"Six?!" Ron exclaimed. Harry did not look overly happy about that either, but he nodded his acceptance without any complaint.

"Yes, six. Be here or be left out." She turned to Harry. "Thanks for your help tonight, Harry." He nodded to her again.

"Hey, what did you do tonight?" Ron asked. "You said you were going to tell us."

Ginny smiled. "Dad is coming to visit on Saturday. See you in the morning."

She left a gaping Ron and a snickering Harry behind. A few minutes later, she was upstairs with her alarm clock set for half five. Satisfied she had a good plan for Malfoy tomorrow morning, she laid down and considered what she could do for her other needed prank.

((A/N: While not helping her complete her reason for coming back in time, this chapter is important for other reasons. :-))

Chapter 6 - Secrets

A little before six the next morning, Ginny went down to the common room. Going to the corner to make her work easier, Ginny conjured a fairly flat box along with some plain brown paper and string. Even though they were conjured, they would last long enough. Next, she cast the snake summoning charm six times before she got what she wanted: a small greenish snake and a large black snake. The other four were medium sized. They seemed content to stay in the corner, and that was fine with Ginny.

As six o'clock came, so did Harry and a very sleepy Ron. When Ron saw what was in front of her, he started to shout, forcing Ginny to quickly clamp her hand over his mouth.

"Ssh, Ron," she whispered and glared at him. "Part of pulling pranks is staying quiet, and if you can't do that, you can go back to bed." She slowly pulled her hand away from him, waiting for his reaction.

"You could at least warn a guy," he retorted softly.

"Be ready for anything. Now, I'm going to ask Harry to do something very special, Ron, and you can not make a sound about it, and you will not give him a hard time about it. Do you understand?" She continued to stare intently at him, to point out that she was serious.

"Why would I give him a hard time, he's my best mate?" Ron asked looking back and forth between them.

"Just don't say a word, Ron. Harry?" She turned to her friend, "I need you to talk to the little green one and ask it if it will help us. I want to put it in a box for a short period of time, where it can take a nap, then when the box is opened, I want it to jump out and bite a person with white hair on the nose."

"Ginny, people can't talk to snakes..." Ron stopped as Ginny's wand came up and pointed at him.

"I said hush. Your part in this will come." She looked at Harry, who shrugged and then knelt down and started to hiss at the snake.

“Bloody...”

“Silencio,” Ginny hissed. “Ron, I swear, this is the last prank I’m including you in. How many hints do you need to keep quiet?!” she fiercely whispered. He continued to mouth things at her, but she ignored him and paid attention to Harry. He finished a minute later. “Well?” she asked.

“He says he’ll do it, but he wants a few juicy bugs first.”

Ginny bent down to pick up her box and conjured a couple beetles and a few fat worms, not really knowing what it wanted. She handed the box to Harry, who picked up the snake and put it in. It started going after the beetles and the worms, so Ginny assumed it was happy and closed the box, wrapped it, and tied it shut with string. When she was done, she handed it to Ron. He mouthed something at her, causing her to remember that she had silenced him, so she removed her spell.

“Finally,” he whispered angrily to her.

“If you’d have kept your mouth shut, it wouldn’t have been a problem. Now hold on to that and don’t drop it.” Turning back to Harry, she said, “Harry, please ask the big black one if he will nicely go with me. I’ll put him somewhere warm he can sleep, but if anyone disturbs him, I want him to bite that person.”

“Er, Ginny, I’m not an expert with snakes, but this one may be poisonous,” Harry quietly said.

“Yeah, well, hopefully biting the person won’t hurt the snake,” she replied with a grin.

Harry looked at her for a moment before he chuckled. “Right, I got it now. That’s funny. Hold on.” He hissed at the big black snake, who hissed back. “He wants a small mouse since you gave the other one bugs,” Harry said.

Ginny rolled her eyes and conjured a small mouse in front of the snake. The mouse never had a chance as the snake quickly struck and then swallowed the small mouse whole. Ron made gulping sounds.

“OK. Oh, you should also probably tell him that after he bites someone once or twice, he should probably find a nice hiding place for a while before he goes back outside.”

Harry hissed again to the snake, and indicated that the snake understood.

“Also, if you would please tell the other snakes that we’re sorry we bothered them, and that you’ll put them back outside. You can put them in the grass outside on the way to the owlery. Here’s a letter for Hedwig to take to my father.” She stopped herself. “You don’t mind if Hedwig does this, do you?”

He shook his head. “No, that’s fine. She’ll probably appreciate the exercise.” He took the letter and picked up the four snakes he was to take outside.

Ginny walked over to Ron and pulled out a quill. Putting it on the box, she said, “Draco Malfoy”. The Dict-O-Quill dutifully wrote that. Putting the quill back inside her robes, she told Ron. “After Harry sends Hedwig off, get one of the school owls to deliver that. Got it?”

“This is for payback for what he did to Hermione, isn’t it?”

“Very good, Ron. Now, there’s an important lesson for all of us. First, we stand up for our fellow Gryffindors. Second, if we stick together and don’t say anything, then we’ll all be fine. What I’m trying to say is that loyalty is important, even if you’re not a Hufflepuff.” She fixed each boy with a questioning look. Harry gave her a quick nod. Ron stared back for a moment before he also nodded. This was not quite the same sort of lesson Harry learned in his second year in the other timeline, but hopefully it was close enough to help him.

“Ron, you and Harry get going before someone comes down. Come back here when you’re done. And for Merlin’s sake, don’t get caught!”

She carefully picked up the big snake and followed the two boys out. As they went towards the Owlery, she headed for the Great Hall. A few minutes later, she cast a warming spell and then a Disillusionment spell before she returned to the Gryffindor Tower.

Ginny arrived at the Tower a few minutes before the boys. A few other students had come down, but no one questioned them being up.

"I gotta go to the loo," Ron said before he walked up the stairs towards his dorm.

She turned to Harry to ask him a question, but he beat her to one.

"Ginny, I know you told me you picked some spells up at home before you started school, but I want to know how you can do all of those. Conjuring live animals is NEWT level work," he quietly told her.

Bloody hell, mentally she cursed to herself. How could she have let herself get so sloppy. She would not have done all of that in front of Hermione. Ron had not noticed and she would not have expected him to. But she had gotten too comfortable with Harry, thinking of him as "her Harry" who knew exactly what she could do. She was such an idiot, she told herself.

"You know what George said, I'm a lot of power in a small package," she said meekly, but she could tell from his expression that he was not buying that excuse. As she considered what to tell him, Ron came back down, and Hermione was there a few seconds later.

"Hi!" she brightly told everyone, appearing no worse after what happened to her last night.

"Doing OK, Hermione?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine, now." There was a brief flicker of another emotion on her face, but it passed so quickly it was hard to tell what Hermione was thinking.

Ginny wondered if her friend was really fine or not, but decided that now was not the right time to ask. "Good, let's go have breakfast. We can't be late to breakfast," she told them as she led them out of the portrait hole, trying to escape her predicament with Harry.

As she went down the stairs, she felt a presence next to her and a soft voice. "I still want an explanation as to why you know more than it appears you should." She glanced at Harry's serious face and nodded. She was well and truly busted, but there had to be a way to salvage this. She was not ready to tell him everything yet. In her perfect plan, she would have told him shortly after he picked her as a girlfriend.

Ron and Hermione lightly argued about punishments for Malfoy. Ron thinking that something severe was in order, while Hermione being more of the mind that detention would be justified. Harry just walked silently beside her; Ginny had nothing to say at the moment either, although she was glad that Ron appeared to be normal and had not said anything about the prank.

The four friends had barely sat down in the Great Hall when Severus Snape walked in. Ginny whispered, "Watch Snape without looking at him," in Harry's ear. To Ginny's relief, the Headmaster was not in attendance.

While she was dishing up her food, the man pulled his chair out and started to sit down. He never made it. For the first time in anyone's memory, the Potion Master screamed in pain and surprise and grabbed his arse. As everyone turned to look at him, he let out a loud "Uh" sort of grunt, reaching with his other hand for the back of his leg. Loud mumblings broke out as the man fell to his knees. Several teachers rushed over to him to see what was the matter.

"Something bit me, twice," everyone heard him say to someone's question. All the students instantly quieted to see what else would be said. They all watched him pull a phial of something out of his robes and quaff it in one gulp. "Hospital Wing, quickly," he ground out through clenched teeth. McGonagall and Vector helped him stand and hurried him out of the Great Hall.

Professor Flitwick started looking around. Ginny assumed he was trying to find a guilty party. Fortunately, Ron was sitting with his back to the head table. A glance showed Harry to be looking as surprised as everyone else, most of whom were quietly speculating as to what had happened to their Potions professor.

“What do you think happened?” Hermione asked. Everyone nearby seemed to shrug or otherwise reply along the lines of “I don’t know.”

Further speculation was put on hold as the morning owls flew in. Ginny watched Hermione take her Daily Prophet from an owl, just like normal. Finally, she saw an owl bring Malfoy a small package wrapped in brown paper. It was hard to hide her glee. She looked at Harry when he nudged her foot; he had the slightest of grins on his face.

A moment later, everyone heard another scream, but this time from the Slytherin table. In the middle of the long table, everyone saw Draco Malfoy jump up with a small green snake hanging from his nose like a very long piece of snot. Ginny could not stop herself and sprayed the pumpkin juice she had in her mouth. Fortunately, it was mostly aimed down, but the rest of it hit Ron in the shoulder. He never said anything as he was too busy to notice as he stared and laughed at Malfoy, who was now jumping up and down and shaking his head, trying to get the snake to let go.

After several more screams that sounded like they came from a girl, the snake was finally flung off and landed on the table in front of Millicent Bulstrode. The Slytherin witch looked at it for a few seconds before she picked it up. Holding it in her hand, she gently stroked its head. A pleased look came over the girl, and there was little doubt that she now had a new pet.

Meanwhile, Malfoy was holding his nose while running around in little circles and jumping up and down, still screaming like a little girl. Most of the students were laughing at him now. Without saying a word, Professor Sprout went over, grabbed his arm, motioned for Bulstrode to follow her, and led them out of the Great Hall.

“Well, Hermione,” Harry said to his friend, “if Malfoy ever gives you a difficult time about that duel, you can throw this back in his face.”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed with a big smile on his face. “His screaming like a girl is something I don’t think I’ll ever forget.”

Ginny just nodded, trying to keep attention away from herself. The pranks had gone better than she had imagined. A moment ago, she had even heard her twin brothers proclaim their desire for a camera.

Hermione stared at them all for a moment before a smile slowly broke out. “That was quite a sight, wasn’t it?” They all laughed again. “I do wonder what happened to Professor Snape, though.”

Everyone shrugged, and Ginny thought that was just fine.

Nothing special happened at lunch, other than Malfoy was back. He was very quiet after what happened at breakfast.

However, dinner was very different. About mid-way through the meal, Dumbledore stood and everyone automatically became quiet to listen.

“I am very saddened to report that Professor Snape was seriously injured this morning. Fortunately, he is well on the road to recovery and should be back teaching his classes in a couple of days. Although all of his classes have been cancelled for today, I shall teach all Potions classes for the next day or two until he returns.” He paused for a moment and looked at all of the students. “If anyone has any information about the attack on Professor Snape or who did this, please see me or your head of house.” As he sat down, many students started to talk to one another. The word “attack” was clearly heard all over the room.

“Did you hear? He called it an attack,” Hermione said.

“I think the greasy git deserved it,” Ron told her.

“Ron, that’s barbaric. You can get expelled for attacking a teacher.”

"Yeah, yeah you probably can, but it doesn't change the fact that he deserved it," he argued back.

"I can't believe you'd say that," Hermione huffed.

"Why not?" Ginny asked, trying to stop a fight between those two before it really got going. "I think I have to agree with my brother. Look at what he does in class, or even outside of class. He helps the Slytherins take advantage of people, like when he gave the Slytherin Quidditch team permission to use the pitch even though we already had it reserved." Ron nodded vigorously. When Hermione opened her mouth to reply, Ginny went on. "And how about in class? He doesn't teach, he doesn't explain anything, and I know he sabotaged one of my potions once." At Hermione's look of surprise, Ginny added. "Yes, he, the teacher, threw something into my cauldron that ruined it so I had to take a zero for the day."

"But he's a teacher," the brunette protested, as if that explained everything.

"Hermione?" Harry got her attention. "You know how he's been towards me since my first day here, even when I had never done anything in his class. I agree with Ron; Snape deserves anything bad that happens to him. If he doesn't like it, he should start doing the right thing or leave."

That gave Ginny an idea.

Hermione did not look convinced, but she did not argue it anymore. Ginny thought that meant that they had given her major doubts. Now, if she could only give Hermione major doubts about Lockhart.

Just after dinner, Ginny managed to sneak away to an unused classroom. It was a real feat, especially since Harry was trying to keep track of her. She knew she could not put him off for very long, but she really needed to do this now. She made a few notes to herself and then spent almost an hour working on her project. At the

end, she was pretty happy. Pulling out her Dict-O-Quill and some parchment, she read her work so it could be copied in a handwriting that was not hers.

Snape,

Allow us to introduce ourselves. We are alumni of Hogwarts who are sick and tired of your shenanigans. Many of us had to endure your abuse in the classroom and out of the classroom. While we hated you, we endured you because we had no choice. As students, we could do nothing about you. But as fully qualified wizards and witches, we now have the power to do the right thing.

For too long we have heard more stories from our younger brothers and sisters, and in a few cases our children, about the unfair treatment and the general inability to teach your subject, denying us and them the opportunity to get the jobs desired because of the lack of a Potions NEWT. You have given detentions where none were deserved. You have demoralized instead of encouraged. You have purposefully allowed students to be physically and emotionally harmed. You have terrorized students. And you have played favorites with your Slytherins (and some of us were Slytherins so we know of what we speak).

We have rebelled. We have pranked. We have complained. We have filed notices. And nothing has stopped you or caused the Headmaster to stop you. No more! We are now determined to put an end to your reign of terror, starting today – or rather yesterday as you read this. You will no longer corrupt and harm Britain's magical youth.

Consider your present situation a warning. You are warned to stop acting the way you have been. You will no longer harm and mistreat students, our brothers, our sisters, our children, and even those we've never met. You must act in the manner of a professional educator, or you must leave Hogwarts.

If you do not, your present problems are but a small taste of what you will experience. We have a long reach, both inside and outside Hogwarts. You must either treat students correctly, or you must leave.

Failure to do one of those two things will eventually result in your death. Yes, we are that serious about this.

Your instruction to a young student to cast a snake summoning charm, and to do so in a manner outside of the rules of dueling, is the last straw. The only reason you had for doing such an action was to humiliate and terrorize another student.

We also want you to know that it does not matter if you show this letter to Dumbledore or not. Our complaints about you to him have fallen on deaf ears and have been ignored; therefore we will ignore him. He can not protect you: there are too many of us.

Decide carefully and decide soon. As the Muggles say: Shape up or ship out.

Concerned Citizens for a Better Hogwarts

Satisfied that it would redirect any potential scrutiny from this morning's event away from her and her friends, as well as give Snape notice to shape up, she sealed the letter in an envelope and Vanished all of her practice copies. All that was left was sending it, so she went to the Owlery to mail it. She wondered what decision he would make as she walked back to the Gryffindor Tower. She really did not mind if Snape stayed, as long as he acted like a decent human being. There would be no second war, if she could help it, so Snape would not have that temptation in this timeline.

Entering the Tower, she was not surprised to see Harry sitting in a chair that faced the Portrait Hole. Sure, he was working on homework with Hermione and Ron, but it was obvious he sat there to be able to watch everyone who entered and left. His look to her made it clear that she should come over. With some fear and trepidation, because she still did not know how to answer his questions, she went over.

"Hi, Harry," she greet him timidly. The others looked up at her too.

"Ginny," he greeted pleasantly, if a little curtly. "I've been looking for you."

She nodded in acknowledgement. "I had to do something else this evening for a little while, but I'm done now."

"So, can we talk?"

Ginny had never seen him this to-the-point, this focused – at least not in this timeline. She nodded again. "Let me put few things up and we can go talk somewhere. You should probably get your Cloak. We might need it coming back."

Ron looked concerned, but it was Hermione who asked the question. "Where are you going? It's almost curfew and you can't be out."

Ginny shrugged. "Harry and I need to discuss a few things and we can't do it in here because there's not enough privacy."

"What are you going to talk about?" Ron asked suspiciously.

"About private things, Ron," she said in a slightly forced tone.

Ron looked a little upset. "Harry tells us everything, so why can't you tell us?"

"Your jealousy is showing again, Ron," she told him, which shut him up.

"Ron's right," Hermione said. "We share everything. Besides, if you tell us, we can help too."

Ginny looked at Harry, who looked very surprised at the direction the conversation was going. "As I said, it's a private matter between us. If Harry wants to share parts of it with you later, he can do so. It will be his choice. But as for the idea that you all share everything with each other, that's – well – that's simply stupid. We all have secrets and private thoughts. Maybe our secrets are simple things that would embarrass us if someone else ever found out." She looked at Ron. "Maybe they're nightmares or things we're afraid of," she now turned to Hermione, "or maybe they're things that have happened to us in the past that we'd prefer no one else ever know." They both looked

down. It probably was not fair of her to use knowledge from the other timeline on them, but she thought they needed to understand.

“We’ll be back later,” Ginny informed them, “maybe even after you’re asleep, depending on how long we talk. Don’t bother getting worried unless we miss breakfast.”

Ron looked alarmed again, as did Hermione and Harry. “But, but you can’t be... I mean, you aren’t old enough...” her brother objected again.

“Relax, Ron. We’re only eleven and twelve. Now if I was fifteen or sixteen, you might actually have to worry about Harry’s virtue.” She smirked and watched Harry blush and look away. Ron and Hermione both looked outraged. Ginny threw up her hands in exasperation. “I give up. None of you can take a joke. I’ll be back in a few minutes. Harry, go get your cloak if you still want to talk.” With that she left.

In her dorm room, she changed into some comfier jeans and a sweatshirt. She also grabbed a book she wanted to show him. Not sure where to hide it, she Disillusioned the book. Her hand would look a little funny, but hopefully it would go unnoticed if she kept it somewhat behind her. Returning to the common room, she found the other three there. She just raised an eyebrow at Harry.

“I’ve got my cloak, come on.” He started to lead her away.

“I still can’t believe you’re doing this,” Hermione muttered.

Both Ginny and Harry ignored their friend and left. She led him up to the seventh floor, looking for a special tapestry.

“What are we doing here?” Harry asked. “There’s no room nearby.”

Ginny just smiled, thinking of a room for them and pacing back and forth. A door appeared a few seconds later.

“Wow.”

“Wow, indeed,” Ginny grinned. “Come on in. Once we close the door behind us, no one will be able to find us if they don’t know we’re here.” Inside, there was an overstuffed couch, like in their common room, and it was covered in pillows. There was also a fireplace with a nice fire. It had a cozy feeling. “Let’s go sit down, Harry. We might as well be comfortable. Harry picked one end and she picked the other. With one pillow behind her, she grabbed another pillow to hold in front of her, and made herself comfortable. The hidden book was laid beside her. “So, here we are.”

“Yeah, here we are.” He looked around. “Where are we?”

Ginny could not help but giggle. “We’re in a place the elves call the ‘Come and Go Room’. It’s a very special place. You think of what you need, pace back and forth, and the room gives it to you. I wanted a comfortable place to talk.”

Harry thought about that for a few seconds. “Very interesting,” he finally said. “This could be a very useful place.”

“Yes, it could be.” If he only knew, but she figured he would do some of those same things again a few years from now.

“So, Ginny. Can you tell me how you can do all of the things you do?” Harry asked quietly.

“Will you promise this all stays between just the two of us?” she asked very seriously.

Harry looked at her very intently for a moment before he said, “I will keep your secrets.”

Ginny looked down and deeply sighed. Fingering the edge of the pillow, she started her explanation, hoping for the best. “I’ll try to explain, Harry, I really will; but know that there are some things I can’t tell you.” She looked up at him and breathed a small sigh of relief as she saw him nod.

"I've thought of this conversation all day, or really a lot longer, but I've never come up with a good answer, so you'll have to forgive me if I ramble a bit." She saw him nod again, still looking very serious.

"I suppose the best way to start is to tell you who I am. You see, while I'm Ginny, I'm also, uh, Ginny."

He gave her a funny look that turned into one of alarm. "Are you possessed?"

"No! No, definitely not," she quickly assured him, now realizing how her statement must have sounded to him. "Or at least not in the way it's commonly understood."

"Huh?"

Ginny gripped the pillow tighter to her. "OK, let me try this. Do you remember my full name from the sorting?" She hated her full name, but perhaps it would be useful here.

'Er, no, sorry. I remember it was sorta like Ginny but different. That's all I remember."

She gave him a faint smile. "I suppose I should be grateful for that, as I've never liked it. My birth name is Ginevra. So you can think of the Ron's little sister as Ginevra. She's an almost eleven year-old witch. Does that make sense?"

"I suppose, except that I thought you had a birthday while I was at your home."

Ginny had to chuckle. Harry had not that been that observant in the other timeline. "Yes, I did, but then I'm not Ginevra, I am Ginny."

"What?" He looked as confused as he sounded, and she did not blame him.

"There's two of me, Harry. There's the witch that I was until you arrived at my house this past summer, and that's Ginevra. Then there's the witch that I am now, and that's Ginny. At the time I

became Ginny, Ginevra essentially ceased to exist. I'll explain how that happened in a minute, but do you understand so far."

Harry scratched the side of his head and looked intently at her. "So, you were one person, then you became another person, but both people were, uh are, you?"

"Yes," she smiled and then chuckled. "I know it's confusing, but that's how I am."

He continued to look at her for a long moment before he shrugged. "OK, so how did that happen? I guess you're going to tell me that this new you is how you can do all the advanced magic?"

She smiled. "Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not smart, Harry." She took a deep breath and hoped this worked. "So, do you know what a time-turner is?" Ginny knew he should learn next year, but it was possible he had heard of them before and she did not know.

He shook his head.

"A time-turner is a magical device that allows you to go back in time for a few hours, usually from one to about twelve." He gave her a shocked look. "Yeah, pretty amazing, huh? Anyway, were you to use a time-turner to go back in time, for the overlapping period, there would be two of you – literally. And because the 'first instance' of you, the one that exists before you used the time-turner, does not know that you did that, it is possible that you could hurt or kill yourself as you may think there is an imposter. They are devices closely guarded by the Ministry, at least usually," she tacked on as she remembered Hermione's usage in the other timeline. That was something she never could figure out; everyone had been out of their mind to let Hermione do that for something as simple as school.

"So you have a time-turner?" It was obvious he was still trying to figure it all out.

"No, I'm just using the idea of a time-turner to explain what happened. What you need to know is that Wizards have figured out how to manipulate time. Time-turners are the normal way it's done."

“OK,” he drawled. “So, you’ve done something like that, but different?”

“Yes.” Now it was going to get hard, she thought. “I did a ritual, Harry, one that sent me, my soul, my knowledge, maybe even a little of my magic back in time; but it wasn’t like a time-turner. I came a long way back and there aren’t two of me physically. The ritual only sent the essence of me back and I arrived the night my brothers broke you out of your relative’s house. Ginevra is the original me that was born in this timeline and basically ceased to exist when I came back. Ginny is the one I think of as myself, and I’m the one that came back in time to take over my own, younger, body. That’s why I can do those things.”

Harry just sat there and stared at her. It was obvious that he was working through that explanation and trying to determine whether he believed her or not. The silence dragged on and he continued to stare.

Finally, she could not take it anymore. “Harry, please say something,” she begged, almost in a whine as she gripped the pillow in front of her even harder.

He blinked rapidly and then looked at her differently, as if coming back to this world. “So you’re from another universe? Another world? Another timeline? Or what?”

“I, uh, I guess you could say I’m from a potential future timeline, or that’s how I think of it. If I had done nothing different when I came back, then I believe it all would have happened the same way again.”

He tilted his head while thinking that through. “So, that’s how you know advanced magic, because you’ve already finished school?”

“Well, no, not really. I had to skip my seventh year, but I know enough to take my NEWTs now, if I could revise to refresh on the theory,” she told him, a little embarrassed, although she could not explain why.

“How old are you?” he asked in wonder.

"I had just had my twenty-first birthday before I came back." She continued to hope that he did not ask much more about her personally, especially about one topic in particular.

"This must be really strange for you then, you know, to be going through school all over again." He looked like he was still trying to wrap his mind around her situation, but he seemed to believe her.

"Yeah, somewhat, but it's not too bad. The worst part is the boredom. The work is really easy."

He nodded. "Yeah, I could see where that might be true." He looked at her for a few seconds before he asked his next question. "So why are you only advancing one year over the holiday? Why not take your OWLs and NEWTs and be done?"

She had to be careful; he was coming dangerously close to yet another topic she really did not want to discuss. "Because I need to be here, Harry. It would look pretty weird for an eleven year-old to ask to take her OWLs. That would draw too much attention to me and I can't have that."

Harry nodded some more, acknowledging her explanation. "You've come back ten years in time and you don't want to draw attention to yourself." She nodded when he looked at him for confirmation. "And you've sorta said that you've made some changes because if you hadn't, then everything would be the same," he said, as if thinking out loud. "In fact, you must be making changes because why else would you even need to come back." He gave her a piercing look. "What changes are you making, Ginny, and why?"

Damn, he was good! She had forgotten just how good he was in working stuff out. Thankfully, he was or she would have died in her first year in the other timeline. What should she tell him? She had not planned on this conversation until this coming summer. She was caught and knew it.

Maybe a summary would be enough. "In the other ... timeline," she decided that would do, "there was a problem. Well, there were several major problems, but there was one that was the root of all the

others. Because of that problem, the war with Voldemort went badly – very badly.”

“How badly?” he interrupted.

“On our side, there was only me and one other person left. Probably half of the good side died before the final battle, and the rest died in the final battle,” she told him quietly, the memories of pain and grief returning to her. “Magical Britain was in ruins and essentially lost. There weren’t enough of us left to repopulate it or to restart our society. I know others were in hiding, but I still think our society was all but dead. We may have won the final battle, but for all intents and purposes we lost the war.”

“So you came back to fix things?”

She nodded. “Yeah, it seemed like the only way. And if it hadn’t worked, then there was no loss.”

A shocked look came over him. “No loss? But Ginny, it sounds like you’d be dead if it hadn’t worked.”

She gave him a grim smile. “I wouldn’t have cared, Harry. That’s how bad it was.” Then she brightened again, more like her normal self. “But it did work, Harry, and I’m back here. I can’t fix the one root problem, but I can fix all the little problems created by the root problem because of my foreknowledge. I’ve already fixed several things and I’ve only got about three, maybe four more to go. When I’ve done that, then I can stop worrying and just live my life again. My reason for coming back will be complete,” she told him with an air of satisfaction. Or mostly so, she thought, as the idea of her and Harry being married again came to her.

Harry sat there looking at her and thinking it through. He had not gotten mad at her or anything like that. He had not asked questions about things she did not want to explain; it was going very well. Finally, he broke his contemplation, and his question wiped the smile off of her face.

"This has something to do with me, doesn't it?" he quietly asked, as if afraid of the answer. "You've been acting and talking like we knew each other really well. Were we more than friends before you came back?"

Ginny knew she must be very red right now. She could not help her blush. She was surprised he had picked up on that, and she was also very worried. He had asked one of the questions she had not wanted him to. Eventually, she nodded as she looked down. She could not lie to him. "We were close friends, Harry." She prayed he did not ask more.

"Just close friends, or more?" he asked.

A quick glance up showed her he was blushing, but he had asked the question and not backed down. He was still staring at her and waiting for an answer. She did not answer.

"Ginny?" His voice went up in volume slightly. Another glance up showed he was glaring at her and looking determined.

"Please, Harry," she asked, suddenly sounding like the eleven year-old girl she looked like. "Please don't ask me any more about that." She did not want him to know about them. Her Harry would take that knowledge and think it must be; it would force him into the role, whether he really wanted to or not. Ginny did not want that, she wanted him to choose of his own free will, even if it meant they never got together again. As much as she wanted to be with him again, she wanted him to be happy more than anything else.

His glare strengthened and he looked like he had in his fifth year. "Ginny, what aren't you telling me?"

She whimpered softly. There was little she would or even could deny him, but she must be strong and hold out on this. "Please, Harry, please don't ask. Please don't make me tell you." Seams started to tear as she pulled the pillow tighter still, while tears started to spill out of her eyes. She could not look at him as she begged, "Please don't stop being my friend; please, anything but that." Ginny did not want to cry, but she could not stop the tears.

“Ginny?” The demand and anger had left his voice; he sounded almost shocked.

Looking up, she saw he looked confused and worried about her. That brought back memories of their time during the war. He looked younger than then, but it was a look her Harry would have given her. Instinctively and before she could stop herself, she flung the pillow to the floor and launched herself at him. Before he could move, she had wrapped her arms around his body and pressed her forehead and face against his chest, sobbing into his shirt as she held him tightly. “Please, don’t ever stop being my friend,” she choked out. “Please...” She hated showing this weakness, but she hated the thought of losing him more.

His arms slowly came around her as he tentatively hugged her back, patting her back lightly. That wonderful feeling of being held by him filled her with a happiness she had missed so much, so she hugged him even tighter.

“Ginny,” he wheezed, “I need to breathe.”

A smile came to her face, breaking the heart-wrenching feeling she had been experiencing a moment ago. She loosened her grip, but she did not let go of him.

“Ginny?” He almost sounded embarrassed, but she did not look up to see if he was. “Ginny, why are you hugging me?”

“Because I didn’t want you to go away,” she told his chest, still afraid to look up.

“Did I leave you, you know, in the other timeline?” He sounded a little worried and that made her feel even better.

“You died in the final battle, Harry.” She said sadly as she turned her head and pressed her cheek against his chest now. She still did not look up. “You were brilliant and fought spectacularly, but there were too many of them.” He had killed Voldemort, but had not been able to hold out against all of the Death Eaters that had been there. She had

been separated from him and was not there to watch his back, like she had promised. The guilt of her failed promise still ate at her when she thought about it, so she did her best never to think about it. However, when she did think about her failure, it drove her to protect him from the Prophecy even more -- to make up for her failure.

He had stopped patting her back, but he still held her, for which she was thankful, especially when he asked his next question.

"It was Voldemort, wasn't it? He tried to kill me as a baby and again last year. He came back and tried again, didn't he?"

Ginny knew she should not be surprised by this insight, as her Harry had these moments too, but she was surprised anyway. She supposed her wonder came from him being only twelve. She nodded against his chest. "He tried, but you killed him, Harry. You beat him." She swallowed and hugged him tighter. "It won't happen again, Harry. I swear to you, I won't let it happen again," she swore fiercely. "Not this time."

Her Harry would have squeezed her shoulders in acknowledgement; this one did not. But that did not matter, he was with her and holding her, even if he did not know why.

"That's what you're doing, isn't it? You're making sure we don't have another war."

She smiled and was happy he could not see her face. He probably would not understand how proud she was of him figuring so many things out. "Yes, Harry, I'm making sure there's not another war. I'll tell you more this summer, but until then, it's not important."

"Why not until then? Why not tell me now?" He did not sound angry, and for that she was glad.

"Because, there's nothing to do until then, and I don't want you to worry about any of it. We'll tackle the problems when they come, both of us together. If everything goes right, by this time next year it will all be over. No more Voldemort, no more possibility of war. Everything will be better." And if things went really well, maybe they would even

be dating by then. Probably not, as Harry had not seemed to notice girls until his fourth year, but then again, she had been a stupid fan girl last time and not like she was now. She grinned as she thought that maybe this time tonight would help speed that up, if she was lucky.

They quietly sat on the couch with their arms still around each other for several minutes. Ginny was still reveling in the feeling when she heard Harry say, "OK, Ginny, I'll trust you for now." That made her feel even better.

"Thank you, Harry. That means a lot to me." She was so happy at the moment, that if they had been a little older, she would have snogged him senseless. As it was, she had to content herself with holding him. Fortunately, he had not let go, nor had he asked her to let go.

"Ginny?"

"Hmm?"

"You said there was one major reason the war was lost. What was it?"

She sighed and sat back up. Ginny would have preferred to just enjoy the feeling of holding him. "Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore?!" Harry sounded shocked. "I thought he was leading our side?"

Ginny could not help but smile at his naivety. "Yes he is -- was -- but he's also human, Harry. Never forget that he's human too. He's very smart and he wants the good side to triumph, but he's also human and makes mistakes." She could tell his struggle with that was brief. "Dumbledore's great mistake was that he held information too closely and didn't share it until it was too late. If he had shared information more often and with more people, it's possible that the war would not have been so bad, and it certainly would have ended sooner with less loss of life. It's a certainty that we wouldn't have lost the war."

“You mean that others could have been doing what you’re doing now, in defeating Voldemort?” She nodded. “So what didn’t happen?”

“That’s the problem, Harry, it wasn’t just one thing. Dumbledore is over one hundred and fifty, plus he’s a very intelligent person. He knows an awful lot, but he rarely shares it in time to help other people because he thinks he knows what’s best for everyone. To make matters even worse, he died at the end of your sixth year before he could share some things with us, which made the war that much harder. He’s not evil or anything, he’s just a little too controlling, especially with information.”

“Like how he didn’t tell me about my family vault and other family things?”

She had to nod again. “Please understand, Harry, he doesn’t do that to hurt people. In fact, it’s just the opposite. He doesn’t tell people because he doesn’t want them to worry about things they can’t change, at least most of the time. Sometimes, he doesn’t say anything because he needs to keep secrets so his plans against Voldemort will work. He has good reasons, but he doesn’t stop to think about what will happen to people individually and how not knowing will hurt them more. He can be misguided, but he’s not a bad person.”

“Do you really think so? I mean, look at what’s happened to me...” He stopped and looked down. She could see him getting upset.

“Harry, look at me.” She put a hand on his shoulder to get his attention and to show support. He did not look happy when he turned to look at her. “I know some awful things have happened to you, and I’m working to correct them. But you have to understand Dumbledore’s point of view. He’s trying to manage a war and so he watches the big picture, trying to keep everything going. In doing so, he’s going to overlook details. Details which are very important to you and me, as they are our lives, but he feels he can’t get bogged down in those details.”

“If that’s true, then how can he care about us like you say he does,” he questioned her logic.

"I know it's hard to understand as it took me a long time to understand too, but he does care about you, Harry Potter. He probably looks at you like a grandson, even if there is no relation between you and him. But in running the war, he doesn't see all the little things he does and how they affect you; he doesn't see the cause and effect all the time. He still cares for you and wants you to be happy, but he just doesn't realize that some of the things he does hurts you at the same time." She hoped she was getting through to him. The sooner he dealt with this and understood it, the better. It would prevent many of the problems he had experienced in his fifth year.

After several long seconds, where she could see him thinking it all through, he said, "So you're telling me that I can trust him, but I also need to look out for myself. Right?"

"Yeah, that's not a bad way of putting it. He has blind spots, like we all do, but he is trustworthy. If he makes you a promise, he will keep it."

Harry nodded. "And what do I have to watch out for?"

Ginny smiled; he was learning fast. "Ask questions about things you don't understand or that don't make sense. You probably can't make him tell you things, but ask anyway. If you find something he won't tell you, come ask me. There's a good chance I'll know. Also, be careful with people around you who are not trustworthy. Another one of Dumbledore's major faults is that he's too trusting, giving third and fourth chances to people who don't deserve them, which lets them take advantage of you."

"Like Snape and Malfoy?" he asked.

She chuckled. "Those are two good examples. You've seen how he is with Snape and all the junior Death Eaters? He never really does anything to correct them. He's too trusting and gives people too many chances with no real incentive to change. Take Malfoy, for example. What has Dumbledore ever done to correct his behavior?"

“Nothing,” Harry said slightly bitterly.

“Yet, I’ve gotten Malfoy to change at least a little by smacking him and threatening worse. If Dumbledore would only suspend him for month, or something to show Malfoy that there are real consequences to his actions, he might reform. But Dumbledore won’t do that, so Malfoy doesn’t really reform because he has no reason to.”

“Makes sense.” A playful look came over him. “You put that big snake up by Snape, didn’t you? That’s why you had me tell it to bite him twice and then leave.”

“Yes,” she admitted with a smile. “It was payback for what he did to Hermione. I was also sending him a message that he can’t get away with hurting people anymore. You should also know that I sent him a letter telling him that he needs to shape up and act like a professional teacher, or he needs to leave Hogwarts.”

“What?” Harry’s eyes were wide and he looked frightened for her.

“Relax. I used a dict-o-quill so they can’t trace the handwriting. I also said it was from a group of Hogwarts alumni so they wouldn’t look at us. I can tell you because our necklaces protect us, so they can’t read our thoughts. We’re safe, but I’m tired of what Snape does to you and the rest of us.”

Harry thought about that. “I see,” he finally said before he grinned. “That’s why you’ve been so hard on Malfoy too, isn’t it?”

She returned his grin. “Yeah, I’m trying to reform him by showing him that he’s not the best around. Snape certainly won’t try to make him into a decent person, and all the other teachers have refused as well, so I guess it’s up to me.”

He nodded as he thought about it. “Makes sense.” Harry looked deep in thought for a moment before he sighed. “There’s so much to think about with Dumbledore. At the end of last year,” he said as if far away, “I asked him if he knew why Voldemort wanted to kill me and he said not today. That means he knows...”

When he did not say anything more for a few seconds, she pretended it had been a question. "Yes, he does, Harry. He knows why, but if you could get him to answer why, he'd tell you that he cares for you and wants you to have a childhood because there is plenty of time to worry about things in the future."

Harry snorted. "That's stupid. I've never had a childhood because of growing up with my relatives."

"I know, Harry. That's why I've promised to get you away from there as soon as I can," she told him fervently.

"I don't know how you plan to do that, but if you can, I'll be really happy and owe you," he promised her seriously.

She smiled thinking of at least one way he could work off that debt. "You'll have to go home with them, Harry, but I don't think you'll be there more than a day max, maybe not even that long."

"What about Voldemort? You know why too, don't you."

Ginny sighed. "Yes, Harry, I do. Can I put that off until this summer? I promise I'll tell you then, and it won't matter otherwise, other than to make you worry."

"That bad?" he asked a little fearfully.

"At first glance, yes, but don't worry, Harry. This is why I came back, so I could make things better. We'll talk about it this summer and we can plan what to do," she told him confidently.

He considered that. "Do you know how hard it is to trust you and wait?"

She nodded. "Yes, but you can trust me, Harry. If things change, I promise I'll tell you sooner, but I really think that you can relax and enjoy school for now. We'll plan the next step of our private war over the summer and then execute the plan during the fall. If all goes well, we should be done by Yule a year from now at the latest."

“Why then, Ginny? Why do we have to wait?”

Ginny sighed. “Because something special has to happen next summer and into September, and we need that to happen. Or at least that happened in the last timeline. Once that event happens, then the rest should be fairly easy. I’ll explain this summer.” She hoped he was still as understanding when he found out about Sirius Black.

“OK, I’ll trust you,” he said with resignation.

“Thanks, Harry,” she told him brightly. “If you want to do something now, there are two things you can be doing.”

“Oh?” He looked eager.

“First, I can show you some exercises that will help you to build up your magical core. Your magic is like a muscle and if you exercise, it will grow stronger faster,” she explained. “It’s really too late for it tonight, but I can show you tomorrow if you’d like.”

Harry looked very eager. “I can hardly wait. What’s the other thing?”

“Second, you can also start some simple exercises to build up your body. A good fighter has the strength and endurance to last a long battle. You’ll do better after puberty gets done with you in a couple of years, but you can start now to give yourself a good foundation.” An impish grin came over her as she thought about what her Harry used to look like. “Plus, it will help you with life in general and with Quidditch.”

He chuckled but seemed to like the idea. “Maybe we should head back, Ginny. I don’t know what time it is, but it’s got to be very late.”

Mentally grumbling at having to stop this private time with Harry, she looked at her watch. “It’s a little after midnight. We can either go back under your cloak, or we can stay here and sleep. I can cast an alarm charm to wake us up so we can head back around half six.”

“Stay here, together?” he almost squeaked, wide eyes staring at her.

Ginny saw an almost frightened look on his face as he looked down at her. She could not help but giggle, which did not seem to help him. "Relax, Harry. If we stay here, we'll only sleep. You're only twelve and I promise not to do anything to you, no matter how much I may enjoy teasing you."

That did not seem to comfort him any based on his expression. "I really think we need to go back, Ginny. I mean, there's only one couch and it wouldn't be very comfortable for you. I also don't think I really want to spend the night on the floor."

Ginny could not help but giggle again as she thought about their needs. The couch suddenly turned into a big bed. She laughed as they fell backwards with her ending up mostly on top of him. While he looked horrified at their position, she stopped laughing and smiled brightly as she moved to the side to lie next to him. Laying her head on his shoulder, as she used to in the other timeline, she said, "See, this isn't hard and I even find it comfy. How about you?" She wondered if he would stay here or not.

He was silent for a moment before he asked, "What about your brothers? I don't think they would approve. I don't think your parents would either, and I'm not sure I could look them in the face next time I see them if we stay here."

Understanding that her fantasy of sleeping with him, even platonically, was not going to happen tonight, she raised up on her elbow and looked at him as he lay in front of her. He was so cute. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable, Harry, so we can go back. We'll just need to go slowly under your cloak so we don't get caught."

His smile became much more relaxed. "Thanks."

Ginny turned around to get up and her hand hit something hard. With a smile, she remembered the book she had brought with her. "Harry? There's one more thing I want to show you before we go back?"

"What?" He looked a little spooked, as if he was afraid of what she had in mind.

She pulled out her wand and ended the charm on the book. At the sight of the book, he relaxed again. "I found this in the library for you today. There's not a lot here, but you'll find a little more on your family in here. I can also probably tell you a few stories too, stories the other you told me."

He looked surprised at that, then thoughtful. "That's how you knew about the Potters and what you said in Dumbledore's office, wasn't it?"

Ginny was again surprised he had put it all together that fast. She did not know why she was that surprised, but she was. She decided right then that she was going to help him with his studies so he could be his best. No longer would she let her brother Ron drag him down. She would not nag him like Hermione did, but she would find a way to push him to do his best. Of course, her being in his classes would help a lot with that, or so she thought.

"Only a little. Most of what I said in there is common knowledge to anyone who was raised in the Wizarding world." She sighed. "That's something else I probably need to help you with."

"What, beyond the book you had me buy? It did help me to understand some things."

"That book was a good start, but there's more. We can take it slowly, but there's more, Harry." She watched him quickly flip through the book. It talked about all the major families, a "Who's Who" in the Wizarding world. When Harry reached the end of the book, he gently closed it and looked at her intently. "Thank you, Ginny. No one else has ever taken the time to tell me about my family."

Ginny mentally kicked herself for not thinking of that sooner. "I'm happy to help, Harry."

He yawned and looked at her. "Come on, we better get back so we can go to bed."

“OK.” She stood, and when he did too, she stepped forward and gave him another hug. “Thanks for still being my friend, Harry. You don’t know how much that means to me.” She felt his arms go around her and squeeze for a moment before he let go. With regret, she let go too and looked at him. He was blushing furiously.

A giggle escaped her before she told him, “It’s OK to hug and touch people’s hands, Harry. I know you didn’t get a lot of that growing up, but I’ll be happy to help you learn that too.” That caused him to blush even more, which she did not think was possible. “Come on, get your Invisibility Cloak out and let’s go back.”

They made it back to Gryffindor Tower without any major problems. They saw Filch at a distance down one of the hallways, but fortunately for them, he was going the other way. At the bottom of the stairs to the dorm rooms in the common room, Harry turned to her and briefly put his hand on her shoulder. “Thanks” was all he said with his smile that could melt her heart.

“Remember, please don’t tell them about me, Harry. That needs to remain a secret,” she quietly begged.

He nodded once. “We talked about my family, that’s all they need to know. Good-night, Ginny.”

“Night, Harry,” she told him with much relief. She went up to her bed feel much better about Harry than she had before their talk.

((A/N: Ginny telling Harry her secret is one of the highlights the story has been driving towards. But there still more she needs to tell him and for them to work out.))

Chapter 7 - New Directions

Ginny was struggling to stay awake as she went to breakfast the next morning. As she met up with the rest of her friends in the common room, it was obvious that Harry also was affected by lack of sleep. It was also obvious that Ron was suspicious about what they had done, based on the way he was eyeing each of them. Despite his prattish behavior, she ignored him for the moment.

As they left the Tower, Ginny purposefully moved back to walk by Harry. Unfortunately, Ron chose to walk on the other side of Harry, so she and Harry could not have a quiet private conversation.

"You OK this morning, Harry?"

"Just tired," he told her. After a quick glance at Ron, who was watching both of them, he added, "Maybe a bit annoyed too. Some idiot decided to wake me up by jerking the curtains to my bed open so the sunlight hit me right in the face."

Ron had the decency to blush in embarrassment. "I said I was sorry. I only wanted to know if you were there or not because I didn't hear you come in last night."

"That's because you were too busy trying to bring the walls down with your snores," Harry replied peevishly and giving his friend an irritated look.

"What time did you get in?" Ron asked.

Ginny noticed that Hermione was now half turning her head as she walked, listening in on the conversation.

"Late enough that I'm tired, but early enough that I'll make it," he said a little sarcastically. "And before you ask, we mostly talked about my family, and that's all I have to say on the subject. So please don't ask."

"But what would Ginny know about your family?" Hermione asked.

While Ginny rolled her eyes, she managed to catch Harry's glare at their bushy-headed friend. She also noticed that Harry did not answer the question either. Mercifully, further conversation was cut short since they had arrived at the Great Hall.

Except for Snape, all of the Professors were there for breakfast already. The four sat down and started eating. The Daily Prophet that Hermione received contained nothing interesting to the students that day. All in all, it was a very normal and mundane breakfast until it was time to leave.

"What do you think Professor Dumbledore will be like in Potions today," Hermione asked to the group.

Ginny considered that, as she had forgotten about having a substitute for today. She grinned as an idea came to her. "I think that today should be a very eye-opening experience."

"Why do you say that, Ginny?"

"Because, Hermione, this is our chance to ask Professor Dumbledore all the questions about Potions that we could never ask Snape. Think about it, we might actually get a decent Potions lesson for once."

Harry appeared to have caught on to her idea, since he added, "Yeah, we can show Dumbledore how much Snape hasn't taught us by asking questions."

"What? Why would we do that?" Hermione looked and sounded confused.

Ginny rolled her eyes at her friend's momentary denseness. "Because that way we can show Professor Dumbledore that Snape is not as good a teacher as the Headmaster thinks. Maybe that will get him to talk to Snape about becoming a better teacher. I'll tell the Ravenclaws in my class."

"Brilliant, Ginny," Ron said with a grin.

"I'll tell some of the Hufflepuffs," Harry volunteered. "I think they have Potions after lunch. I know the Slytherins won't help."

"Too right," Ron muttered.

Hermione looked aghast at the plan that was coming together. "But, but..."

"Oh, relax, Hermione," Ginny told her. "You don't have to help if you don't want to. Besides, you really can't ask questions you already know the answer to." Her friend blushed at the implicit praise. "Time for class," she told them as she got up from the table. "I'll see everyone at lunch." With her salutation, Ginny left for her Potions class, running to catch up with some of her classmates for a hurried conversation.

Ginny sat in the Potions classroom. Several of her friends in both Gryffindor and Ravenclaw looked at her with an "are you sure" look. She just smiled and nodded. As the beginning bell rang, Professor Dumbledore walked into the room.

"Good morning everyone. Since Professor Snape could not be here this morning, I shall be his substitute to the best of my ability." Dumbledore waved his wand and the instructions for the standard Strengthening Potion appeared on the board. "As you can see, this potion has both Bullrushes and a pinch of ground crab shell. Who can tell me why those two ingredients are in this potion?" He looked around but no one raised their hand. "Anyone?"

Ginny decided to be the one to break the ice, so she slowly raised her hand.

Dumbledore smiled his grandfatherly smile at her. "Yes, Miss Weasley."

"I'm afraid we don't know, Professor. Professor Snape has never taught us why the ingredients react together like they do. Sometimes

he'll assign an essay where we encounter that sort of answer in the research, but he's never taught us about ingredient reactions."

The old man looked surprised and looked around. Ginny saw that several of her classmates were nodding their heads.

Matty, one of her roommates raised her hand, and Dumbledore pointed to her. "Professor? Your list says to finely cut the Bullrushes. Why do they have to be finely cut? Isn't cutting them short enough to fit into the cauldron good enough?"

Ginny thought that one was a bit overdone, but they were first years and Snape had not told them why. On the other hand, she decided that maybe it was a good question after all when the Professor slowly looked up at the ceiling for a few seconds, as if asking for divine intervention. She suppressed a giggle at his action, and at his grimace as several Ravenclaws started to raise their hands with questions. She had a feeling that they would not be brewing a potion today.

Ginny purposefully took her time leaving Potions and a slightly flustered Professor. Her prediction had been correct; they had not brewed anything today. Once the Ravenclaws had started asking questions, Dumbledore never had a chance. She had barely left the classroom when Harry, with Ron and Hermione closing following him, walked up to her.

"How did it go?" Harry asked quietly.

She could not help but grin. "Spectacularly!" He blushed slightly when she flashed him her largest smile. "We asked so many 'why' questions we never brewed anything."

"Brilliant," her brother crowed, while Hermione frowned.

Harry gave her an impish grin. "That's great. I've told the others. Of course, since we share a class with the Slytherins, it will be different."

“Just do your best to ask honest questions. I gotta run, tell me at lunch how it goes.” She pushed her book bag back up on her shoulder and headed off to Charms. She was looking forward to swapping stories at lunch.

Ginny almost fell off her seat, she was laughing so hard. Harry and Ron had been telling her about their potion class, after she had told about hers.

“I can’t believe Malfoy actually tried to sabotage your Engorging Potion with Dumbledore in the class,” she exclaimed.

“It was great,” Ron said with enthusiasm. “Even though Dumbledore was helping Neville, he still saw Malfoy toss that bit of coal into our cauldron. After he quickly banished our work, as he said it could have exploded, he told Malfoy how disappointed he was with him, and then he gave the git detention for three nights for causing an unsafe situation.” Harry was nodding his agreement, also with a smile on his face.

“So,” she looked at Harry, “do you think Dumbledore thinks as highly of Snape as he used to?”

He shrugged. “It’s hard to tell; he doesn’t give much away if he doesn’t want to.”

“I can’t believe how many questions you asked him,” Hermione commented with a slight huff of incredulity. “I mean, if you’d only read your book, you’d know most of them.”

Harry shook his head slightly. “Yes, Hermione, the book might have told me that the badger bile had to be fresh, but did it explain why?”

“No,” Hermione answered, “but everyone knows that liquid ingredients are always better if they’re fresh.”

Ron rolled his eyes. "No, Hermione, everyone does not know that. And besides, most of us have better things to do than to read Potions books for fun."

It was all Ginny could do to not laugh at the indignant look Hermione was giving her brother.

"I mean, look at Harry," Ron went on, oblivious to the eruption about to happen. "He's got Quidditch practice three nights a week, and those of us who want to be on the team have to practice too."

"Ron!" she ground out, stopping him. "This is a school and we're here to learn, not play some stupid game."

"Stupid game?!" Ron looked at her as if she had suddenly sprouted horns and a spiked tail.

Ginny looked at Harry, who rolled his eyes at her and motioned his head towards the door. She got up when he did and they two of them walked out of the Great Hall, their friends still arguing behind them and unaware of Harry and Ginny's departure.

"I really wonder about them sometimes," Harry said with a sigh.

She could not help but nod. "Yeah, they seem to argue about everything. It almost makes me wonder if they just like to hear themselves talk."

"Could be," he said without conviction. "What's next for you?"

"History of Magic."

"Right after lunch? I bet that's hard to stay awake in," he said with a grin.

Ginny gave a small snort. "Very." She looked at him trying to see what he was thinking, but his expression gave nothing away. He looked like he was just enjoying the moment. "You gonna be OK after staying up so late last night?" she asked with concern.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. I have Transfiguration and then Herbology. Those are pretty hard to fall asleep in.” He looked at her with a questioning look, but she was not sure what for. “Thanks for answering my questions, Ginny, uh, you know, last night.”

“Sure, Harry. I can’t believe I slipped up and let you notice what I was doing, but I’m glad you got to find out about your family.”

He nodded and then stopped, so she stopped in the corridor too. “I gotta go this way,” he pointed with his thumb. “Are we going to get together tonight so you can show me those exercises?”

“Sure,” she agreed. “We can find a room somewhere after dinner.”

“OK. Thanks again, Ginny.”

“Anytime, Harry.” She watched him walk away, before she turned to go to her class. “Anything for you, Harry,” she whispered to herself.

While the students were having lunch, the Headmaster and three heads of house went to the Infirmary to visit the last head of house. They let themselves into the small private room the injured Professor had insisted upon. Each of the visiting professors conjured a chair around the bed.

“What is so important that it could not wait?” McGonagall asked, breaking the silence in the room.

Dumbledore pulled a parchment out of his robes. “We seemed to have mostly solved the mystery of why Severus was bitten by a snake. He received this post this morning, which he had a house-elf bring to me. Dumbledore read the letter from “Concerned Citizens for a Better Hogwarts” out loud.

“That’s appalling,” McGonagall commented, deciding it was best not to say anything else. However, someone else seemed to have more courage at the moment.

“But not entirely surprising, is it?”

She looked at Flitwick, who had a resigned look on his face. “No,” she sighed, “it’s really not. I’ve seen the many complaints.”

“So a few brats complain,” Snape sneered. “Most of them are dunderheads who have trouble telling the difference between their head and their cauldron.”

McGonagall noticed that Sprout was completely silent and had a look of restraint. Dumbledore was watching them all, as if trying to divine who knew what.

“If my house is average, it’s not a few complaints, Severus,” Flitwick corrected the Slytherin. “I know I see at least ten a year, and that’s just from the students. I get some from parents too. Minerva, since they all should go to you, how many are there?”

“From the students, I see nearly twenty-five a year. From the parents, I usually see more than forty a year; the bulk of those coming after the school year ends.” When Snape started to protest, she added, “And these complaints have been registered since your first year, Severus. So I understand why alumni might say that they’ve had enough. Albus, I simply do not understand why you leave him as he is.”

Dumbledore sighed. “Severus is more than just a teacher. I also vouched for him at the end of the last war and promised to watch over him. I felt that was most easily done if he was here.”

“Albus, that may work well for you, but it does not work well for the students, and it makes it harder on the rest of us as well,” Flitwick said.

“How so?” the Headmaster asked.

“The most obvious problem is that we have to listen to all the complaints, take time to counsel the students, and take even more time with the parents.”

Sprout nodded her agreement.

"In addition," Flitwick continued, "a number of students refuse to take NEWT Potions solely because Severus teaches it."

Dumbledore looked like he was going to disagree, but McGonagall stopped him. "Filius is correct, I've had students tell me just that, even after they made a 'O' on their Potions OWL. I personally believe many students would drop the course after their first year if it was not a required core course."

Sprout nodded at this too before she added to the conversation for the first time. "And then they come to us to tutor them in NEWT Potions, which they study for independently so they can take the test to try to get their desired job. That tutoring requires even more of our time." Flitwick and McGonagall nodded their agreement.

"It has got to stop, Albus." McGonagall turned to the Potions master. "Severus, while I violently disagree with their methods, I'm afraid I have to agree with their goal. You must either shape up or ship out, as they said. As Deputy Headmaster, I will do my best to help you become a better teacher, should you decide to stay," she looked back at the Headmaster, "but I will not tolerate the status quo much longer."

"I'm afraid I must agree with Minerva."

McGonagall had rarely seen Filius look and sound this serious.

"I love this school and teaching. Finding gifted students, such as Miss Granger," he shot the head of the lions a smile, "who really should have been a Ravenclaw, is an added joy. But if nothing changes, Albus, this will be my last year here."

Dumbledore looked shocked to hear that, but the next one compounded the feeling.

"Headmaster, I too must offer my conditional resignation with my two colleagues," Sprout told him. "I am loyal to the school, which is why I've been here for so long, but Helga Hufflepuff knew that it was

better to stand by what was right. I can no longer stand by and see students hurt like this, and if my resignation is what it takes to force this terrible situation to change, then so be it.”

“I see.” Dumbledore looked very tired for a moment; his jovial nature and twinkling in the eyes completely gone. “I thank everyone for your input. I shall consider this and talk to Severus about it later this evening.” He got up and left, not even bothering to Vanish his chair.

As the other three professors started to follow him, Snape softly called to one. “Minerva? A moment of your time please?”

For one of the few times she could remember, there was no smirk or sneer on his face. She nodded to him and closed the door behind the others, although she continued to stand near the door.

“Minerva,” he paused, considering his words. “Minerva, were you serious with your offer, on teaching?”

She was surprised by his question, as she had assumed the battle to change him would be much harder; but then, perhaps the snake and the letter had already started him thinking about his future. “Aye, I was. Besides discussing teaching, I thought that you might benefit from observing a few of my classes, as well as allowing me to observe a few of your classes, so we could honestly discuss techniques and problems. Are you serious about changing so you can stay here?”

There was silence for a long moment. “Perhaps. I have no desire to leave Britain, but if I were to stay in Britain,” his expression turned sour, “I do not believe I could get a job anywhere else than here.” He turned and looked out the small window in his room.

While she did not know for sure, she suspected he was correct. If the alumni were after him now, they could see that he was blacklisted all over the country. “I know you always haven’t had an easy life, Severus, but if you truly desire to change, I will help you. But if you are just scheming to stay here and act just like you have been,” her voice started to rise, “then I promise you, I will see you sent packing

or Hogwarts will close! I completely agree that this school has already seen too much of your tom-foolery.”

He stared at her for a moment, his face an unchanging mask. “I shall consider your offer.” He turned to look back out the window, staring out it as if lost in thought.

Minerva McGonagall ignored the slight and left, wondering what would become of the man.

After the last class of the day, Ginny went to the library to see if Harry was there. He and Hermione were, each looking over books on the shelf -- he in Charms and she in Transfiguration. Ron was nowhere to be found. Ginny walked over to Harry. “Finding what you’re looking for?”

“Mostly.” He pulled down a book and flipped through it. “I think this one will be the last I need.”

As they were about to leave, Millicent walked in and over to the Charms section, probably to do the same assignment, Ginny thought. An amusing thought came to her, so she grabbed Harry’s sleeve to keep him from walking away. “Hey, Bulstrode.”

The Slytherin girl gave her a questioning look. It was not hard to interpret it to mean that she wondered why Ginny was speaking to her. “Weasley. Potter.”

“Bulstrode. Do you still have the green snake you got yesterday morning?”

“Sure. Why do you ask, Weasley?”

“I’m sure it would like something to eat and to see an old friend. Maybe you should bring it dinner with you.” Ginny could not help the knowing smile, or really a smirk if she was honest with herself. She also noticed that Harry seemed to struggling to hold laughter in.

With a perfectly straight face, Millicent said, "You know, you might be right. I'm sure Persephone wouldn't mind some entertainment either."

"Persephone?" Harry asked as if he could not believe what he had heard.

"Yeah. Anything wrong with that Potter?" she asked in a slightly challenging manner.

Harry quickly shook his head. "No, nothing wrong at all. I was just surprised, that's all." He now grinned. "I do hope you bring Persephone. I'm sure she'd be a big hit."

The Slytherin girl reached into a pocket of her robes and pulled the little snake out, all coiled in her hand. It uncoiled slightly and tasted the air. Millicent gently stroked the snake's head. "She is cute." Millicent chuckled a little evilly and petted the snake again before she put the snake back in her pocket with a smile. "See you at dinner." The girl walked to the end of section of books and started scanning the titles.

Ginny grinned and walked with Harry to check out his book and then leave. "That was interesting."

He chuckled. "I can hardly wait for dinner."

Ginny had to agree.

An hour later, they were leaving the Great Hall to look for an unused classroom.

"Can you believe the screaming Malfoy did?" Harry asked, barely containing his laughter.

Ginny could not help but snort. "I swear, he screamed more tonight than he did yesterday morning. He's such a wimp."

"Too true!" Harry agreed.

“How about here?” Ginny opened a door. Looking inside, it seemed perfect. Lots of room and empty except for a teacher’s desk a few old chairs. After Harry closed the door behind them, she showed him her levitation exercises by transfiguring the desk into solid iron and then levitating it and holding it there for as long as she could. She also showed him how to do push-ups, sit-ups, and some other simple exercises.

Harry knew a few more from Muggle primary school. He promised he would start doing them three nights a week.

Saturday morning finally came and Ginny was on pins and needles. Her father had replied that he would be here, and a part of her dreaded this meeting, even if she knew it had to happen. As with others, she hoped she could hide her secrets from him, but was afraid some of them might come out, and she was not ready for that yet. She really needed one more year.

Her brother, Hermione, and Harry joined her in the common room and the four went down to breakfast.

After they had sat down, Hermione glanced up at the head table. “I heard Professor Snape is out of the hospital. Since he’s not here, I assume he’s still not completely healed.” She was still the only Gryffindor that seemed to care in the slightest.

“Swt”, Ron said between bites.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Ron, that is so disgusting. Don’t talk with food in your mouth.”

“Hey, I gotta eat, and if I’m going to talk, it’s going to happen sometimes,” he replied as if it should be obvious.

“No, Ronald, it does not have to happen.” Ron looked up in alarm as she used his full first name. “I swear, maybe we should make you sit somewhere else until you learn some matters.”

“Hermione, do you really think shunning will change him?” Ginny asked.

“Shunning? What’s that?” Harry asked. Ron had the same puzzled look on his face too.

“To shun, to deliberately avoid or push someone away from a group in an effort to make them change,” Hermione quoted from memory.

Ron looked a little apprehensive. “Isn’t that a little extreme? I’m only eating.”

“You’re being extremely rude, Ron,” Hermione answered. “If you don’t learn to do the right thing now, it will be much harder later after years of habit.”

“He already has years of habit doing that,” Ginny said. “Even Mum has been unable to break his bad habit.”

Hermione looked at her with a thoughtful look. Ginny started to snicker, as did Harry.

“What?” Ron asked.

“She has the look of a finding a new project, Ron,” Harry told him with a smile. “I suggest you just give up now and make it easy on yourself.”

Whatever Ron might have said to that was interrupted by the noise level quickly dropping. Everyone was turning to the doorway to see a man and woman standing there. Ginny instantly recognized her parents. While she put a smile on her face, inside she was not happy her mother was here. Ginny thought she would make things much harder. The couple walked over to the Gryffindor table, waving at the professors as they did.

“Ginny, Ron.” Their mother greeted them and pulled them into a hug. “Harry, dear, how are you?”

“I’m fine, Mrs Weasley.”

“And Hermione dear, how are you?”

“I’m doing well, Mrs Weasley. Thank you for asking.”

Her parents looked down the table and walked over to their other three sons at school, greeting each of them. After spending a few minutes at the other end of the table, the couple returned.

“Well, Ginny, since you appear to be finished with breakfast, how about we go for a walk and talk?” her father asked her.

“It would probably be best to find a classroom, Dad.”

He nodded and her mother looked at her with concern, but did not say anything. “If you like. The Headmaster said we could use the waiting room, if need be.”

She nodded. Before she got up, she looked at Harry and nodded, which he returned.

“Shouldn’t your brothers be coming too?” Her mother asked with some worry in her voice.

“No, Mum. This does not concern them, at least not now. I’ll tell them later.” Ginny noticed that Hermione was looking at her curiously, which she did not like, being afraid that her friend would try to stick her nose into this to figure out what was going on.

Ginny followed her parents across the Great Hall, with most eyes on the three of them. There was little she could do to avoid this, and wondered what rumors would be started about her now.

After they went into the room and sat down, her father asked, “Now, Ginny, what’s so important that we needed to come up here for?”

“Just a minute more, Dad. One other person is about to join us.” She watched him raise his eyebrow in question and her mother about to ask, when the door opened and Harry stepped through. She smiled at

him and patted the seat next to her. "Now, if you could ward the room for privacy, Dad, that would be very helpful."

He and her mother watched Harry come over and sit next to her on the couch. After a few seconds, her father slowly drew his wand and cast a silencing spell at the door. When he was done, he put the wand in his lap instead of into the wand pocket of his robes. He was much more serious when again asked, "What's so important that we needed to come up here for?"

"Are you and Harry doing something together that you shouldn't be?" her mother asked with suspicion on her face.

"Mum! Please don't jump to conclusions. I've asked you here because, well, because I need your signature on a business contract I've created." When her parents started to interrupt, she hurried on. "Harry is here because he's a partner in the business venture. I need you to sign the contract as our adult representative because we're underage."

Her father's eye narrowed. "Business contract? Business venture? Those are not normal for an eleven year-old," her father said suspiciously. "What's really going on, Ginny?"

This was not starting well, she thought. "Dad, I know that most eleven year-olds don't start businesses, but I had an idea and I've spent a lot of time in the library doing research. Part of my research was how to how to protect yourself in a business and I've learned a lot of things, a lot of words, most people my age don't know. It's really that simple. You can ask anyone in Gryffindor, or even Madam Pince, about how much time I've spent in the library this year."

Her father was still looking at her suspiciously, while her mother was looking between her and Harry.

"Why don't you tell us about this business and let's see where that takes us, hmm?" her father asked, looking at her intently, as if trying to see what she was really up to. A part of her cursed the twins for their pranks, which was probably driving their suspicion.

“Sure, Dad. You see, I was reading about the history of Hogwarts and one of the stories, uh, intrigued me, I guess. Fifty years ago, they say that Slytherin’s Chamber of Secrets was opened, but they never found it or what caused all the problems surrounding it.”

Her parents both shuddered slightly. “Yes, we’re familiar with the story,” her father told her. “Please continue.”

“Well, I started wondering about it and did a lot of research about it, and I figured out where it is and what is in it.”

Her father looked astonished and slightly excited. “Really? Do tell.”

“I believe there to a thousand year old basilisk in the chamber.” Her parents rocked back in their seats as if they had been shoved. “Then I got to thinking about how much money could be made from selling it off as potion ingredients.” As her father started to say something, she hurried on. “Dad, I’ve never been embarrassed or anything by our lack of money because we have a great family, but if there was an opportunity to change that and make things a little easier, I thought I should take it.”

“A thousand year-old basilisk?” Arthur looked at Molly, who could not seem to speak.

“Yeah, I’m thinking it should be about fifty to sixty feet long by now, and that will be worth a lot of money. So I made a contract proposal to the Headmaster that we split the money from the sale of the potion ingredients: forty percent for the school, forty percent for me, and twenty percent for Harry. I want to keep a quarter of my share for me, perhaps as my dowry, and I’ll give the rest to the family so all the Weasleys can benefit.”

“Oh Ginny,” her mother finally found her voice as she leaned forward and gave her daughter a massive crushing hug. Ginny was feeling light-headed when her mother let her go. “You can use a little for spending money, but you can’t go spending all of that. You’ll need to put it in a vault and leave it there for later.”

Ginny could only nod at the command, as she knew fighting her mother over that would be useless. Of course, she would keep the key, so it would simply be a matter of not letting her mother know that she was making withdrawals when she wanted money.

"Do you really think it's there?" her father asked with a slightly excited voice.

"Yes, Dad, I'm certain of it. It's the only thing that fits all the clues."

"But Ginny," she looked to her mother, "you can't go down there. Basilisks are very dangerous creatures. You'll be killed!"

Ginny had to resist rolling her eyes at her mother. "Mum, I don't have to kill it. Part of the contract describes who has what duties. Professor Dumbledore is responsible for killing the basilisk. He just has to make a rooster crow in its presence and the basilisk will die. As Bill has said, the hard part of any treasure hunt is learning what traps are there, and once you know, defeating them is usually pretty easy."

"Well, that makes me feel a little better, knowing you won't be killing the basilisk. But why is Harry part of this, if you did all the research?" Her father suddenly added, "No offense, Harry, but I want to know about all of this."

"None taken, Mr Weasley," Harry told him. "Ginny believes that the entrance to Slytherin's Chamber can only be opened by Parseltongue commands." At their blank looks, he added, "And I can speak Parseltongue."

"No!" Mrs Weasley exclaimed.

"Mum!" Ginny had to shout to get her mother's attention, although her father looked quite shocked as well. "There's nothing wrong with Harry for being able to speak to snakes. There are others who can naturally or else learn to speak with some animals, and they aren't considered Dark or evil. Harry is not Dark, but he inherited this ability from one of his ancestors." She knew exactly where it had come from, but her parents did not really need to know that Voldemort had given Harry the ability.

"He inherited it?" her mother asked, calmer now.

"Yes, Mrs Weasley. The book in the library says that it's an inherited ability, like a Metamorphmagus," Harry explained.

Trying to change the current focus, Ginny said, "So, since Harry is the only one who can get us into the Chamber, he is a partner and receives a share of the treasure." She pulled out the contract and handed it to her father. "This is what I gave to the Headmaster, and he's taking it to the school's Board of Governors. Assuming we all can agree on it, I need one of your signatures because I'm a minor."

"I have to have an adult sign it with me too," Harry added. "While Professor Dumbledore has offered to do that, I would prefer to have you do that, Mr Weasley." When the man looked at him questioningly, Harry only said, "I have my reasons."

The two adults read through the contract. After a few minutes, they put it down. "Well, it seems reasonably straight-forward."

"So you'll sign it?" Ginny asked hopefully.

Arthur looked at his wife. "As long as you stay out of the Chamber and away from the basilisk until after Professor Dumbledore has killed it, then I agree," her mother said.

"I'll stay as far away as I can," Ginny promised, hoping that was vague enough, as she might still have to be nearby.

The parents nodded and looked at Harry.

"Yes, sir, I promise too," Harry assured them. "I'll have to be there to open the doors and such, but I'll stay as far back as I can."

"Very well then." Arthur pulled a quill and ink bottle out and signed the contract. Giving the quill to the children, they signed it too. "I'll give this to the Headmaster before we leave."

"Thanks, Dad, Mum!" Ginny got up and took a step over to hug each of her parents. "Uh, will you do one thing for me, please? Will you keep this a secret? I'd like to surprise the rest of the family with it at Christmas."

Her parents smiled at her. "Of course, dear, we understand," her mother told her. "You are so much like your brother Bill," she said fondly.

"Harry and I will probably have to use the Floo to come home, as we'll only be there for a day or two. We'll be spending the rest of the time at school, helping to harvest the potion ingredients," she explained.

Her mother looked disappointed. "I had so hoped you'd be home for the entire time."

"I'm sorry, Mum. How about we come home on Christmas Eve and then not go back until Boxing Day? That will give us a couple of days there with everyone," Ginny offered.

Her mother looked disappointed, but nodded. "I understand. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Ginny decided that was her cue for the other thing she wanted to discuss with them. "Mum, Dad? There is one more small thing..."

Her mother looked alarmed again.

Ginny wondered why everyone always assumed the worst. "You know how the Headmaster says I can jump to the second year because I've been getting good grades here at school?"

Her mother's expression brightened. "Yes, dear. We're so very proud of you for being able to do so."

"I am too, Ginny -- very proud." Her father sounded and looked it too.

"Can you please keep that a secret until Christmas too? The Headmaster said I needed to wait until after the exams, and well," she turned a little sad, "I'd rather deal with this at home than here."

“Why?” her mother asked.

“You’re worried about Ron, aren’t you?” her father asked.

She nodded. “Yeah. I’d rather he blow up at home and have some time to get used to it before we all come back to school.”

Her father nodded. “I think that’s a good idea. I also think that your mother and I should be the ones to announce this.”

Ginny grinned and hugged her father again. “Thanks, Dad!”

“Anything for my favorite daughter...”

“Daaaaad!” While she was embarrassed by him, she was so happy to have him around to tease her.

Everyone else laughed.

“Was there anything else, honey?”

“No, Dad, everything else is great, other than a few idiots who can’t seem to stop showing their stupidity. But I have friends here, so it’s all good in the end,” she told them, and noticed that Harry was nodding his agreement.

“That’s good, dear,” her mother told her.

“Very good then, you mother and I will go see the Headmaster and leave the signed contract with him. You two have a good rest of term.” Arthur stood and lent a hand to his wife.

Ginny was surprised to see Harry mimic her father. She took his hand to stand, although they let go fairly quickly. When she turned towards the door, she saw her mother looking at them with a little smile on her face. She almost groaned at the thoughts she knew was going through her mother’s head. The woman was probably already planning a wedding. Ginny wanted a wedding with Harry, but it was far too soon to even think about it.

Exiting the little room, they found all of her brothers still in the Great Hall. They asked why their parents were there, but all they said was they needed to have a conversation with Ginny. When Ron complained about Harry being there, Ginny noisily cleared her throat and glared at him. Ron quickly dropped the question. A few minutes later, the adults left to find the Headmaster and were gone. A few glares from Ginny stopped all questions her brothers had of her and Harry. The power she had over her brothers was heady at times.

In many ways, the next week seemed quite normal for Ginny, except for one very significant thing. Professor Snape did not act like his normal self, and that gave Ginny hope for him.

In his first class back, she noticed that his teaching style had not changed. He still put instructions on the board and told them to follow them, while giving no help. However, she very quickly noticed that Snape had not insulted any of the Gryffindors in her class. True, he has said almost nothing at all, merely giving them glares, but she felt that was preferable to the insults he normally gave about the Gryffindors inability to do acceptable Potions work. He also had not taken any points from them today, which was a first in her experience this year.

At lunch, she was surprised to find Harry commenting favorably about Potions.

"I still don't understand our good fortune with Snape," Harry said as she sat down, "but I'll take a lesson like that any time. I think I almost learned something in there today," he said with a grin.

"Ha-ha," Ron laughed, "good one Harry."

"So you had a less stressful time in Potions today too?" Ginny asked as she dished her food.

"Yeah, it was amazing. Snape didn't insult us once, and he's never skipped any opportunity to verbally abuse me before."

"Harry," Hermione protested.

"You know it's true," Harry told her. "And he even stopped the Slytherins from sabotaging our work for the first time. He didn't take any points away from them for trying, but he did stop them, saying it was very bad to add foreign substances to a brew, as it could be dangerous." Harry rolled his eyes at the obvious statement. Ron snickered.

The conversation continued and Ginny wondered why she had not sent the threat sooner, or why no one else had ever done it. Thinking about it some more, she realized the threat would not have been enough by itself; the difference was the threat after the potentially deadly attack.

Over the next week, she heard more reports about Snape's changed behavior, including sitting through a class where Snape actually explained the homework he had just returned, and why the correct answer was the expected answer. Ginny silently congratulated the man on his change. With more changes, he would soon become a real teacher.

Ginny received congratulations at the end of the week, when the Headmaster stopped her in the hallway on the way to dinner. He quietly told her that the Board of Governors had agreed with her idea, before he handed her two signed contracts, asking her to give one to Harry. She politely thanked him, after which he asked her and Harry to come to his office the morning everyone went home for the Christmas holiday. This was going to be a very busy, but happy, Christmas.

When Saturday morning arrived, everyone was at breakfast excitedly talking about the Gryffindor/Slytherin Quidditch match in about an hour and a half. She was really looking forward to watching the game this time around. She did not have a fond memory of it last time around as she had already been possessed by the damn diary by this time. A shiver ran through her as she remembered that.

Watching Harry leave with the rest of the team, as Oliver Wood led them off, she wondered if it was morally allowable to bet on the outcome of the game, considering she knew how the game should

turn out. Of course, it was Quidditch, so some random factor might change the outcome of the game, but she did not think that would happen. She had faith that Harry would show Malfoy up and get the Golden Snitch, despite the fact that Malfoy had a newer broom. Harry would catch the Snitch despite the Rogue Bludger.

As that memory came to her, she mentally swore at herself for forgetting. Although she stayed calm on the outside, she was panicking on the inside. She had to stop that insane house-elf or Harry would get hurt again.

When the rest of her friends got up to start going out to the Quidditch pitch, started to go and then made the excuse that she had to go to the bathroom first. Hermione offered to accompany her, but she sent the rest on, saying she would only be a few minutes behind and asking them to save her a seat.

The moment she was alone, she darted into an empty room and quietly shouted, "Dobby! Dobby! Come here I need your help!" She waited and half a minute later, she was still the only one in the room. "Damn! I'm an idiot. Of course he won't come to me, he doesn't know me and he's certainly not bound to me." Thinking quickly about how to get a hold of him, she decided that the only way would be to find another elf to fetch him, so she raced towards the kitchens.

A few minutes later, she rushed into the kitchens as if the hounds of hell were after her. A few elves were in front of her and looked up in alarm. Realizing she must look like a mad woman, she did her best to calm down and then knelt to be closer to their height and less threatening.

"Can we help you, miss?" one of the elves squeaked.

"Yes, I need your help. I need your help to speak to Dobby. He's a house-elf for the Malfoy family. He might be at their house, or he might be here at Hogwarts, but I desperately need to speak with him." Ginny prayed they would help her find him.

"Why do you need to speak with him?" said an older elf. "He is not here."

Hoping for the best, she told them, "I think Dobby is going to do something to try to help a student, but he doesn't know that when he does that, the student will get hurt. I need to talk to him to try and stop him. I know Dobby is only trying to help, but it's the wrong kind of help. Please find him and ask him to come talk to me here," Ginny said earnestly.

The elves looked at each other and seemed to have a silent communication. After a few seconds, the older elf snapped his fingers and he was gone. Ginny hoped that meant they had decided to help her, but they had not said anything. The other younger elves all turned around and went back to work making lunch.

Nearly half a minute went by before there were two pops. The older elf had returned and, thankfully, he had brought Dobby with him.

"You ask for me Miss?"

"Yes, Dobby. Listen, I need to know, have you already changed the Bludger in the Quidditch game that's about to start?"

The elf suddenly looked very afraid and raised his hand.

"No, wait!" Ginny cried and Dobby stopped, although his hand was still up. "I'm not trying to hurt you and get you trouble, but I need to get you to make the Bludger normal again. Harry Potter is not in danger anymore."

"How do you know about danger, Miss?" Dobby asked, his hand still ready to do magic.

"Listen Dobby, I know about you trying to keep Harry safe from the danger. I know what the danger is. It's a little book, an evil book, isn't it?" Dobby nodded, his big eyes focused on her. "Then please don't worry because I destroyed the book; it can't hurt Harry anymore."

"You destroy evil book?" He sounded very amazed. "But you a little Miss."

It took Ginny a second to understand, and it caused her to smile. "Yes, I'm a young witch, but I spent a lot of time in the library reading, and I found out how to destroy the book without hurting anyone." OK, it was two half-truths, but that made a whole truth, right?

"The book be gone?" Dobby asked as if he had to make sure.

"Yes, Dobby. I used a special spell to burn it and it became ash. The book is gone forever. So, can you please fix the Bludger so it doesn't hurt Harry?"

Dobby nodded and smile. "Yes. I go fix iron ball now."

"Thank you, Dobby! You're a good elf. I know that your cruel master is in prison now, but I'll try to find a way to get you away from the Malfoys. It may take me a year or so, but I'll try very hard," Ginny promised.

The elf looked like he was about cry with happiness. "You are a great witch, as great as Harry Potter!"

Ginny was not sure if that was a good thing or not, only time would tell. "Thank you Dobby. Please go fix the iron ball; we don't want Harry to get hurt."

Dobby vigorously shook his head before he snapped his fingers and left with a pop.

Ginny sighed relief and told the older elf, "Thank you for helping." The elf shook his head as if she was a mad woman.

Ginny made it to the stands only a few minutes before the game started.

"What took you so long?" Hermione asked when Ginny sat down.

"I wanted some pumpkin juice too, so I took a quick trip to the kitchens." Ginny shrugged as if it was no big deal. Hermione looked at her strangely, but dropped it as the players flew out.

The game started and Ginny eagerly watched Harry whenever he did something other than circle around. The rest of the time she enjoyed watching the Chasers. It really was too bad the Gryffindor team had such good Chasers; she would have to wait a few years to play on the team again.

After a little over an hour, she watched Harry catch the Golden Snitch to end the game, giving the win to the Lions. Malfoy never had a chance. The even better news was that Harry did not get hurt and Lockhart never had a chance to remove the bones from Harry's arm this time.

((A/N: Ginny averts a minor problem, but perhaps she should have let Lockhart remove Harry's arm bones to show Hermione how bad he is. :-))

Chapter 8 - Hunting and Gathering

It was a week before Christmas and things were going well, Ginny thought. Exams were now over and she knew she had done well on them all. She still dreaded having to tell Ron she would be joining him in his year of school, but being able to be in the same classes with Harry would be worth the difficulty with Ron.

This morning's Daily Prophet main story was about Amelia Bones' interim position for Minister for Magic becoming permanent. Ginny was not sure why it had taken the Wizengamot so long to do that. The safe answer was probably a lot of political infighting and a Wizengamot that was evenly split on both sides. The first thing the new Minister had done was to make Kingsley Shacklebolt's interim position over the MLE permanent. Ginny thought that was probably a good thing.

More interesting than all of that was the behavior change in their Potions teacher. Ginny was very amazed at his change. Granted, it has not been a total reversal over-night. No, he had still been a royal pain in the ass for the next month had he had returned from his attack, but it was immediately obvious that he was trying to change. Sure, he would never win a Congeniality award, but he was actually teaching Potions.

The first noticeable thing was that he had stopped hovering over people, silently goading nervous students into making mistakes. He still walked around and made comments, but his comments were now warnings about safety, something he had never done before.

Then McGonagall had shown up in a few classes and stood at the back of the room. She never said anything, but she was there watching. Harry and the other second years had asked around and it seemed like she had monitored his class more than any other, but she showed up in various Potions classes over a two week period. Percy had said she had even shown up in his sixth year Potions class. The most useful result from that was Snape started explaining more things. The most important result was that he no longer had as much bias for the Slytherins or let them sabotage anyone else's potions.

Snape was still no saint and he still had a slight bias for the Slytherins, but his class was mostly tolerable and they actually learned something from him. Harry said Snape watched him a lot, and still glared at him from time to time, but at least he had stopped all the insults and undeserved punishments. Ginny decided that she would not have to make him have a Potions accident after all.

As she and her friends sat down for dinner, a common topic for the last couple of weeks came up -- again. She would have thought that her brother had worn this one out, but apparently not.

"Ginny, are you sure you and Harry aren't going to come home on the train?"

She could not help it, she had to roll her eyes and she made sure he saw it, because she knew he was really asking why she was staying behind. "For the last time, Ron, no. I've already explained that we have some extra credit work here at the school over the holidays, but I will be home for Christmas. Mum and Dad both approved it."

"I just don't know why you won't tell me," he said sullenly. "You never used to keep secrets from me."

Ginny was "this close" to sending a Bat-Bogey hex his direction. "Sorry, Ron. The guilt trip route won't work on me, and it won't work on Harry either." At least now that I pointed it out to him she mentally added.

"But you're making my best friend stay here and I don't get to either," he huffed.

"Ron, I told you that everything would be explained Christmas morning." She now glared at him. "Now just shut up before I hex you."

Hermione sighed with an expression of long-suffering, which Ginny ignored. Even Hermione had tired of the argument and given up, as neither Harry nor Ginny had budged in their explanations. Even worse for the brunette, she was forced to wait until she got back from her trip to France with her parents before she found out, a mere few

days before the next term started. Ginny almost told her anyway, but decided it was best not to.

The next morning, as most of the students went to Hogsmeade to catch the train home, Harry and Ginny walked to the Headmaster's office. There, they found a small crowd. In addition to the Headmaster and Snape, which they had expected, they also found Professors McGonagall, Flitwick, and Sprout.

"Good morning, Harry, Miss Weasley," Dumbledore greeted them. "Thank you for being prompt. I'd offer you a seat, but I believe we will not be staying here. Am I correct?"

"Yes, sir," Ginny told them. "Am I to assume that the other Professors will be with us for the hunt and salvage operation?"

"You are quite correct, Miss Weasley. In addition, once I told them what we were doing, well, you could say that curiosity overcame them," Dumbledore said with a slight chuckle. "Let me pick up this box and we can be off." A single scratching sound came from the small box, about one foot on a side.

"I hope you have a rooster in there, Professor," Ginny said as she led them out of the man's office.

"Of course, Miss Weasley. I'm sure you'll be happy to know that I've even successfully made it crow. I thought that a useful test." Dumbledore was carrying on as if it was all a joke at a party.

The more she was around him, the more Ginny had to agree the man was somewhat barmy. "That's good to hear, Professor. The other ways I've read about to kill a basilisk sound less than pleasant." She heard a snort behind her, but from its direction, she thought McGonagall had made the noise. The thought of her usually stern teacher doing that made her smile. Glancing over at Harry, who was walking beside her, she saw him grinning too. He would not be grinning if he had known how he had killed the basilisk in the other timeline.

A few moments later, the group was at the second floor girl's bathroom.

"The entrance is in here?" McGonagall asked, sounding scandalized.

"Yes, Professor. I would have thought that both you and Professor Dumbledore would have figured this part out, as you were both here the last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened." Ginny thought Sprout would have been too young, but she looked at her Charms professor. "Professor Flitwick, were you here fifty years ago?"

The little man smiled at her. "No, Miss Weasley. I had already graduated ten years earlier. However, I am impressed by your research to have found this. What was your most significant clue or clues?"

Ginny gave a knowing smile and opened the door to the bathroom and walked in. "Hello, Myrtle? Are you in here?"

A ghost stuck her head through a stall door. "Ginny? You came back." The ghost smiled. "And you brought more friends. Minerva! I haven't seen you in a long time." She looked around at the rest of the group. "Ooh, who's the boy, I like him. He's cute." Harry blushed and all of the Professors softly chuckled.

"To answer your question, Professor Flitwick, Myrtle is the reason I figured it all out. She was the last victim of the previous time," Ginny explained.

"You're not going to tell them about my end, are you? That's so depressing." Myrtle returned to her stall and they heard a splash and gurgling.

McGonagall shook her head and quietly said, "She was actually quite nice before the accident -- quiet, but nice."

"You knew her?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Yes, Mr Potter, I knew her, even though she was two years behind me and in Ravenclaw. That incident came at the end of my sixth

year.” McGonagall stated very matter-of-factly. She turned to Ginny. “Miss Weasley, did she tell you anything of importance?”

“Yes, Professor. In talking with her, she said that the last thing she saw was two large yellow eyes from over by the sinks. Given that, I knew to search for the entrance there. That was also verification that the monster is a basilisk, the king of serpents, and probably pet of Salazar Slytherin.”

“Good show, Miss Weasley,” Flitwick complimented her. “Take ten points for Gryffindor for your research and well-thought out logic.”

“Thank you, Professor.” Ginny turned to Harry. “Your turn is next, good sir,” she said with an impish smile. Walking over to a sink, she pointed to a faucet. “You can see an image of a snake here. Try asking it to open.”

Harry walked over and stared intently at the faucet.

“I don’t understand why Mr Potter is doing this,” Sprout said.

“Open!” Harry commanded, although everyone else just heard hissing.

Sprout gasped, while McGonagall exclaimed, “Oh my!” Flitwick was bug-eyed. Snape’s eyebrows were at the top of his forehead. Only Dumbledore showed no sign of surprise, and that was because he already knew Harry could speak Parseltongue. Everyone watched the sinks move and reveal a large hole in the floor.

Harry looked down it first, since he was standing right there. “We have to slide down that?” He did not sound very excited.

“Since I don’t see a way back up and there must be one, ask for stairs, Harry,” she instructed him. Foreknowledge was so great, she told herself. Harry hissed again and they all saw stairs slide out from the side of the tunnel. Shrugging Harry started walking down the stairs, lighting his wand as went.

Before his head was below floor level, Snape finally spoke up. “Potter, an adult should go first. There’s no telling what may be down there.”

Harry shrugged. "If you want, Professor." He walked the half dozen stairs back up and let the Potions teacher go first, then followed him down. Ginny considered that while not friends, and she was sure the two never would be, at least they were not at each other's throats.

Ginny stepped forward and followed Harry. The rest followed, McGonagall, Sprout, Flitwick, and finally Dumbledore at the end with his rooster in a box. While far less messy, the stairs took a long time to get down. As she remembered it, there were lots of rat bones at the bottom. They were quite distasteful to walk on.

Once everyone was at the bottom, they continued on to the anteroom. There, they found the shed snake skin Ginny had seen last time. It was over twenty feet long.

"Impressive," Snape dryly commented. "That alone is worth several hundred Galleons."

At the other end of the room, they saw a door with snakes around the edges. Harry hissed again and the snakes moved, unlocking it, allowing the door to split in half and open. Again, Snape took the lead and walked through the doorway. The rest followed. It was a big room, cavernous -- in both meanings of the word. In the distance, they could hear water dripping.

"Harry, try asking for lights and see if that gets us anything," Ginny whispered. It seemed wrong to talk.

Harry hissed and torches all around the very large cave turned on, momentarily blinding everyone. As Ginny got her sight back, she noticed that Harry was looking at the other end of the cave, past a number of pillars holding the ceiling up, towards a face carved into the very stone wall. "What is it, Harry?" she quietly asked.

"I thought I heard someone talking. It sounded like I heard the word 'hungry'."

Ginny could not stop the shiver that came over her. "That's probably the snake, since you heard it as a voice and I did not."

“Where did the voice come from, Harry?” Dumbledore asked, looking around like everyone else.

“From behind the statue.” Harry stood transfixed, as if not sure what to do next.

Dumbledore lightly cleared his throat. “I believe this is the point that everyone but Harry and I should return to the other room. Harry, if you would stand behind one of these pillars, when all is ready, you can command it to open and then I shall make the rooster crow.”

The others started going back, except for Ginny. She walked over to Harry. “Please be careful, Harry.” He nodded. “If a plain ‘open’ doesn’t work, try things like ‘Slytherin says open’, or ‘Speak to me Slytherin’, and things like that. In the books, Slytherin is portrayed as egotistical, so it may be some flattering phrase.” She had to make it look like she did not know everything. After he nodded again, she leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. “Good luck.” She enjoyed his blush for a few seconds before she turned and left to join the others.

Ginny stood at the doorway, close enough to see Dumbledore and Harry, but far enough back she could not see the other end of the room. McGonagall stood behind her with a hand on her shoulder to make sure she could go no further in.

“Whenever you’re ready, Harry.” Dumbledore looked and sounded like this was a normal everyday event. Ginny did not know how he did it, as she was very nervous. This should not be hard, but there was always that chance that something could go horribly wrong.

She heard Harry hiss, but nothing happened afterwards. He hissed something else and waited. After his fifth try, she heard stone grinding in the big cave. As she saw Dumbledore pulled the cover off of his box, McGonagall pulled her backwards further into the anteroom. She heard Harry hiss some more and an answering hiss, as well as a sound like leather on stone.

After what seemed like the longest twenty seconds of her life, she heard more hissing and then Harry say "Now" in English. A few seconds later, a rooster crowed three times while she heard a lot of leather on stone noises. The snake was thrashing, obviously in its death throes. It did not take long for even those sounds to cease and it became eerily quiet.

"Harry?" she called out, not caring that her normal voice sounded very loud.

"You may come out, Miss Weasley. It is safe now," Dumbledore told her.

Pulling herself from McGonagall's grasp, she ran into the big cave and over to Harry, pulling him into a Weasley hug.

"Ginny," he gasped, "I need to breathe."

She let up but did not let go. Suddenly, she felt his arms go around her and her world was perfect yet again.

"Merciful Merlin!" The squeak from Flitwick surprised her and she let go of Harry to look over her shoulder. The four heads of house were all shocked by the sight in front of them.

Snape recovered first and walked toward the dead beast. He stared in at it from up close, as if giving it respect, before he shook his head and started walking towards its tail, taking very measured steps. A minute later, he shouted from the other end of the cavern, "I make it nineteen yards, a bloody fifty-seven feet," he swore as he walked back.

Ginny had to suppress a laugh. If they only knew that Harry had killed this thing with a sword and a little help from Fawkes.

"Tilly!" Snape suddenly called. Nothing happened. "Where is that blasted elf?"

"Uh, Professor?" Ginny said tentatively, as he seemed to be in a bit of a temper at the moment. He turned and glared at her. "Professor,

we're very deep underground and based on the water, quite possibly under the lake. Unless you have a personal bond with her, she may not be in range to hear you."

Dumbledore chuckled. "Well argued and probably correct, Miss Weasley." He turned to the Potions master. "Severus, why don't you start with the containers you have on you and I shall find your house-elf and send her down to bring more containers to you." He looked at the snake again before he looked at her. "Well done, Miss Weasley, very well done."

"Headmaster?" she called before he could go. "I have a suggestion and a question." He nodded for her to continue. "Professor, this Chamber seems like such a significant find, I think it should be opened permanently, especially now there is no longer a monster down here."

Dumbledore smiled and started slowly nodding as he thought about it. "Yes, a capital idea, Miss Weasley. Some work would have to be done, but that might make a good project for some of our NEWT students. What do you think, Professor Flitwick?"

"Oh, absolutely!" He looked overjoyed at the idea.

"Professor McGonagall?"

"I would agree, Headmaster," McGonagall said with a small smile. "I can easily think of several things to be done for safety and then to make it a nice place to visit. Although, I believe part of it should remain natural to show the original condition."

"Yes, yes. I can hardly wait to start working on this," Flitwick agreed. "Of course, we shall have to wait until Professor Snape is done harvesting before we can open it up to very many people."

"I quite agree, Professor Flitwick," Dumbledore said. "Miss Weasley, you also had a question?"

“Yes, Headmaster. When do you expect the first sale to take place?” Ginny asked eagerly. “I was hoping to have some money for Christmas shopping.”

A chuckle escaped Dumbledore. “I would expect some of the more volatile parts will be sold over the next few days, but if you would like, I can loan you some money until then.”

“As can I,” Harry softly added.

“Harry, I was going to use some of that to repay you for the other loan,” she quietly whispered. Turning to Dumbledore, she said, “Thank you for your offer, Headmaster, but as long as the first sale happens in the next few days, that will be soon enough.” She turned to her friend. “Ready for work, Harry?” He nodded and they walked over to Snape, who was already expanding shrunken containers that had been in his robes.

“Professor McGonagall, I believe you have the first watch until lunch.” She nodded to the Headmaster. “Very good, then I shall see about sending some elves down with containers and at an appropriate time, some lunch.” He walked back towards the anteroom, with Flitwick and Sprout following him.

Ginny turned back around just in time to watch Snape pluck a giant yellow eye out of the snake. It almost made her sick to watch.

“Magnificent,” Snape said reverently. “The two eyes should be worth nearly fifty thousand Galleons considering the size of them, although, to maximize profit, we shall have to put one of them in stasis for several months so we don’t ruin the market.” He continued talking to himself over the parts, while Ginny recorded what was harvested and Harry did mostly manual labor, moving the containers around to speed Snape up.

Ginny glanced back and saw that McGonagall had conjured a chair and small desk, allowing her to grade papers while her presence as a chaperone was required. Ginny assumed the box of essays had been shrunk and carried in the professor’s robes.

Several hours after they had started, McGonagall called to them. "Lunch is ready."

"In a moment," Snape irritably replied. "I've got to at least finish the barrel of blood." It was their second full-sized barrel.

Ginny and Harry walked over to McGonagall, who sent them into the anteroom. "I had the elves set up lunch in here. I don't think I could eat while looking at that snake."

Even though Ginny was now used to the sight of a 'messy snake', she still agreed with the woman.

"If you'll hold out your hands, I'll clean them for you." McGonagall cast a cleaning spell over both of them.

Professor Snape joined them a few moments later.

He seemed to be in an odd mood, Ginny noted. He seemed to be both upset and excited at the same time. She assumed the excitement came from working on this opportunity, but the hint of anger was harder to place. It would have been easy to say that he did not want to be interrupted in his work, but he had been like this most of the time he was down here. He had kept his temper and not been insulting, which was a wonderful thing, but there was definitely an edge to him that was hard to identify.

Lunch was fairly quiet, as three of them were heartily eating, having worked up a real appetite. McGonagall was mostly picking at her food. Ginny assumed that was influenced by the location they were in.

"Miss Weasley." She looked up at Snape. "Would it be possible for me to have some samples of these ingredients? With having access to the whole basilisk, there are some potions I would like to try that I would not normally be able to attempt, due to the rarity of the parts or the cost being prohibitive."

She looked at Harry, who only shrugged at her. "Well, Professor, would this be for Hogwarts use or for you personally?"

He stopped eating and stared at her as if it was a question he had never thought about, or perhaps he had not expected her to be so exacting. "Some of it would be for Hogwarts, to support Madam Pomfrey," he finally said. "But most of it would be for me to personally experiment with."

"I see. And if these experiments were successful, then what?" While she could brew quite well, Ginny knew she was not the best in theory, and therefore, would never be a potions master. She was not sure what he might want to do with them.

"Many of them would allow me to recreate and better understand potions there were once thought lost. Some of them would potentially expand the art of Potions, and would also be written up in a Potions journal."

He still looked on edge to her, but at least he had been very polite in the conversation. She wondered how much of that was his new personality and how much of it was due to McGonagall sitting here. "Is there much commercial prospect from this work?" she asked.

Snape looked surprised at the question. "For a few, possibly; but for most of them, no. They require ingredients that are almost impossible to obtain or are in such limited quantities that not much can be done with them. Basilisk ingredients are very hard to find. Commercially raised basilisks are usually quite small, less than a yard long. Bigger ones become hard to control or simply take too long to raise to make it worth it. Also, most basilisks that are raised are blinded immediately after hatching to make them safer."

Ginny nodded. "I see. I understand from my research that there are very few who raise them, due to the danger, and the difficulty in getting a license."

"That is very true," he agreed.

She looked at Harry and said, "Maybe a cooperative agreement?"

"I'll trust you," he told her.

Ginny noted that his comment seemed to surprise McGonagall. She supposed she could understand, since he appeared to be deferring to an eleven year-old girl. "Professor Snape, Hogwarts owns forty percent of what we're harvesting. I would suggest you ask the Headmaster for part of that forty percent for ingredients that will support Madam Pomfrey, or that will be used to expand educational work that might increase Hogwarts' reputation." Snape nodded and she assumed he had been thinking similar thoughts. "For the work that has commercial value, we could give you those ingredients from our portion and we would split the profits fifty-fifty."

"Sixty-forty, I will be doing all the work," he countered.

"But we are taking a risk by giving you ingredients that we don't know if you will be make something useful out of or not, as opposed to selling them where we know we will make a profit." She wondered how long it would be before one of these two asked her how old she really was, but many wizards were lacking in common sense. She could only hope that held to these two where she was concerned. Really, how many first-years understood the basics of economics?

"I still say sixty-forty. I'm sure you will receive more by backing me than by only selling the parts. It is possible that Mr Potter will directly benefit as well, since one of the potions correct deficiencies of the eyes." Harry suddenly looked interested. "The catch is it requires eye of the basilisk. That is so hard to get, almost no experimentation is done with it."

"But you said that each eye could be worth like twenty-five thousand Galleons." She hated to admit, but she was not following his logic.

"I did, but once I've perfected the Potion, each dose of the restorative could go for a thousand Galleons." He turned to Harry. "Tell me Mr Potter. If you could have perfect vision again, would you pay one thousand Galleons?"

"Yes, sir," he said without hesitation.

With a know-it-all smirk, Snape turned back to Ginny. "There you go, Miss Weasley. I know that not every person could afford that, but

there are enough that could around the world that we would never have enough of that Potion. In fact, we should charge more just to limit the market and maximize our profits. The other fact that I'm sure you fail to understand is that one of those eyes would easily make fifty or more eye restorative potions. So you see, the finished product would be worth double what selling the raw material would bring you." He leaned back with a very satisfied looked, as if daring her to refute his logic and plan.

At the moment, she could find no hole in his logic, other than if they sold the eye "raw", they would get all of the profit, although from a smaller sale. But if the eyes were used for potions, they would only get a portion of the larger sale. Which sale would be bigger?

"It's an interesting proposal, Professor. I'm afraid I can't make up my mind at the moment, but I do think we should discuss this with the Headmaster. It might be best to sell neither of the eyes and make potions from both of them."

He tilted his head slightly in acknowledgement. "A valid proposal as well. I also agree that the Headmaster should be included in the discussion, as he represents the third partner. Perhaps this evening?"

"Assuming time and energy allows. I heard you say that you planned to put a stasis spell on them. I think that will give us enough time to come to a decision," Ginny said.

"It will."

"Professor, may I ask a Potions related question?" Ginny asked tentatively. The conversation was going so well, she felt emboldened to try to answer a mystery.

"You may, Miss Weasley." Snape looked at her with what almost might be respect.

"Professor, I've found a book called 'Fundamentals of Potions' that has helped me greatly in understanding many of the whys in Potions, and well, I'm wondering why you don't recommend for all first years?" Ginny hoped he did not take the question as a slight against him.

"You mean the book by Jacobsen?" he asked. Ginny nodded and saw him honestly consider the question. "I assume by your question, and by your good marks, that you feel it has helped you significantly?"

"Yes, sir. It has given me the background information on why Potions work the way they do, why ingredients interact with some but not others. It's told me why it's important to have uniform preparation of the ingredients, and so on. If it has helped me, who came from a Wizarding home, then students who are Muggle raised would really benefit from it," she explained fervently.

Snape considered her explanation. "I would have thought that sort of information would have been obvious from the homework I assign throughout the year, but upon reflection, I do see your point that this information might be useful if known all at the beginning. I will give it serious consideration, Miss Weasley."

"Thank you, Professor."

Snape nodded solemnly, as if unused to receiving praise. "We seem to be done with lunch; we should return to work. We will be lucky to be done before you leave for Christmas." He stood and briskly left for the other room.

Ginny mentally and physically sagged. She was also quite sure the back of her blouse was damp with sweat from the negotiations. This had been a most unusual lunch. In fact, given that Snape had been civil to them the entire time, it was downright weird. As were the looks McGonagall was giving her and the fact that her head of house had said almost nothing during the entirety of lunch.

"Professor, do you have any advice for us? We could use any help we could get." She asked, hoping this would allay any thought McGonagall might have of her being too old.

"Only that you also consult your father as well. He should be present to help protect your and Mr Potter's interest."

“Of course, Professor, I was planning on having him join us,” she said with a smile, so she would not sound so much like a know-it-all.

“You have exceptional parents, Miss Weasley. I believe you should rejoin Professor Snape. Professor Flitwick will be along shortly to supervise the afternoon, although I’m not so sure it’s needed now,” she mused.

“It’s hard to tell,” she looked in the direction of the Postions Master, “but he has changed for the better since the contract was originally agreed to. Ready Harry?” Ginny asked. He rose with her and they returned to work. Yes, it had been a very unusual lunch.

The afternoon was progressing well, although it was obvious they would be very tired that evening. They would almost have Gryffindor Tower to themselves too. Only two seven year girls were staying as well, and they had stayed only so they’d have more time to revise for their NEWTs, so they were almost never seen. If she and Harry had only been about three years older, she would have been overjoyed to have the Tower to themselves like that. She would have snogged Harry on every couch and chair in the common room, and then conjured a fur rug in front of the fireplace. Those images made her grin.

Ginny glanced over at Flitwick while she waited for the next container to come her way. She was amused at the little table and chair he head conjured for his work; they were sized perfectly for him, as they would be for a young child too.

“Mr Potter?” Snape’s voice called from the other side of the snake. “I need a one gallon barrel and the shoulder-length dragon-hide gloves. It is time to milk the venom sacs.”

“Yes, sir.”

She watched Harry levitate the items to Snape. Harry was at the front of the snake, where she could see him. Snape was not visible.

"Mr Potter?"

"Yes, sir?"

Ginny blinked at the realization that Snape had used 'Mr' for Harry all day long, instead of just his surname. It was a pleasant surprise and she thought a good indication that Snape really was changing. Her surprise turned into panic as the man asked his next question.

"Would you tell me about your childhood?" It was a bland tone, but that did not matter. It was a subject a person did not talk to Harry about unless he volunteered it, but Snape did not know that. The problem was compounded by the fact that it was Snape asking, the one who had continually insulted him and his father for over a year.

"My childhood -- sir?" Panic and dread were starting to creep into his voice, but Ginny was not sure Snape would recognize them as such, especially as he was concentrating on his harvesting task. Ginny slowly pulled her wand out in case she had to use it. She wondered if there was such a thing as a "Calming Charm", but she could not ask at the moment without drawing attention to herself, and a glance showed her that Flitwick was oblivious to the potentially volatile situation.

"Yes, the time before you came to Hogwarts. There are so many rumors about you, but I'd like to know the truth," Snape went on, still ignorant of the mine field he was walking in. Ginny had once seen a person in the other timeline, who had barely known Harry, try to get a nineteen year-old Harry to answer this sort of question. The accidental magic that had happened to the person, even though Harry had said nothing and had not drawn his wand, required nearly a dozen potions to fix. The man who had asked the question never asked Harry another question again -- about anything. Of course, the man had picked a particularly bad time to ask when Harry was already upset, but Harry's reaction had added to his already legendary image.

Ginny paled as she saw a very slight glow start to surround Harry's fingertips, something that she had not seen until he was eighteen in the other timeline. She considered and then threw out the idea of a

Cheering charm, guessing that it would be useless to calm him. A non-verbal Stunning spell seemed like the best bet if he did not calm down soon. That would have been suicidal even for her in the other timeline, but this Harry was not that advanced yet so she should be able to stop him. Still, accidental magic could do incredible things, so she readied herself for anything that might happen.

"I lived with my relatives," he slowly ground out, "my Muggle relatives who hate me."

Snape went precariously on, much to Ginny's horror. "Ah, that would explain much." Harry's glow increased and covered his whole hands, not that he was aware of it. Ginny raised her wand, hoping she could stop Harry before he did something everyone regretted. "Based on what I have seen of you, I assume they don't like the Wizarding world either, do they?" Snape asked, still in a monotone.

"No, they hate it too," he said forcefully. "I didn't even know of the Magical world or about my parents until my Hogwarts letter."

Ginny was starting to cast the Stunning spell when Snape said, "Then I am truly sorry for many of the things I've said to you, Mr Potter." She barely managed to abort the cast as she saw Harry's magical aura around his hands dissipate. "I'm afraid I fell victim to the same disease as others in assuming that your childhood was one of privilege, just like your father's. You may not know that he and I fought all throughout our Hogwarts years, but it was so. That and your appearance, which looks so much like him, caused me to treat you like him. However, in the last month or so, I have paid much more attention to you, how you appear and how you act, and I will say that you act much more like your mother than your father."

"Thank you, sir," Harry said slowly, "I appreciate it."

Ginny was not sure what he was appreciative of, but finally decided it was probably everything said. She started to shake slightly as her adrenalin went away, so she looked around for a place to sit down. In her search, she saw Flitwick motioning to her. She walked over a little unsteady, and was grateful when he conjured a chair for her beside his.

“Miss Weasley,” he said very quietly. “May I ask what first-year spell you were about to cast to save Mr Potter? Or were you about to try a spell you have never done before?”

She was about to be upset with the little man, until she realized he was only concerned with Harry’s welfare. That she was about to admit to considering a second year charm would not be good. “I was considering a Cheering charm, but decided at the last minute that might not be a good idea. I would have liked to have a spell that did the same thing as a Calming Drought, but hadn’t heard of one.”

He nodded for a moment. “Yes, very lucky that you did not cast that charm, Miss Weasley. A Cheering charm on an angry person will usually provoke them into an immediate fight, as it gives them a false sense of confidence. In this case, I’m not sure who would have been hurt worse, you or Professor Snape.”

Ginny closed her eyes and hung her head, thankful she had avoided the Cheering charm. There would have been nothing wrong with the Stunning spell, but she could not admit knowing a fourth year spell to the Professor.

“Take five points for your excellent wand control in being able to stop the spell in mid-cast, but please be careful of your charm selection in the future.” She meekly nodded. “And give Mr Potter a little room to make mistakes. They may be painful at times, but sometimes that is required and the only way to learn a lesson. He may also surprise you for time to time as he avoids a mistake at the last minute,” he said with a smile.

“Thank you for the advice, Professor. I’ll take it to heart.” She took a deep breath to cleanse the tension a little. “If you’ll excuse me, I think I need to go upstairs to the bathroom.”

“If you wish, but I believe the elves set up a temporary loo in the anteroom so you don’t have to climb all the way up and down.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll check it out.”

“One of them also wrote ‘Porta-loo’ on the side of it, which I find very strange. If you come up with any insight into that, please pass it along.”

Ginny wanted to giggle, but he looked completely serious, which made her desire to giggle even stronger. “Yes sir, I’ll do that. Thank you again.” She turned and quickly strode out, barely able to contain her laughter. Ginny had to wonder which elf had been in the Muggle world as she entered into the little blue stall. This had to be the most bizarre day in her life -- either life.

Ginny and Harry finished late in the night on the twenty-third. They and Professor Snape were quite tired from the week of mostly twelve hour days. Even Professor Sprout seemed exhausted on the last shift, and all she had done was to sit in the Chamber and write Christmas letters.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, she and Harry used Professor McGonagall’s Floo to go home. Besides a bag of clothes and her book bag, she also had few a very special things she had owl ordered.

Professor Dumbledore had given a money bag to both she and Harry yesterday afternoon. It was the proceeds of their first sale. Understanding her desire for Christmas shopping, the Headmaster had given part of her money to her in Galleons, and the rest in a vault. He had also given her some blank bank drafts for transferring money to her parents. All in all, he had been very helpful. Now all she had to do was to convince her father to take her Christmas shopping.

As they came out of the Floo, they saw her father in the living room reading the Daily Prophet. He gave both of them a warm welcome and a hug. “Ginny, Harry,” he called as he drew them in. “It’s good to have you home.”

“Thanks, Dad. It’s good to be home.”

“Did your work go well?” he asked with a bit of excitement, almost as if he had discovered some new Muggle item.

Ginny looked at Harry who grinned back at her. "Yes, Dad, it went very well. In fact, can you take us shopping in Diagon Alley today? I need to get my Christmas presents."

Her father smiled at both of them. "Do you need to go too, Harry?" The boy nodded. "Very well, then. Go say hi to your mother and drop your things off upstairs and then come back down and I'll take you. Harry, you'll need to bunk with Ron, as we should have a few visitors soon."

"Thanks, Dad. Come on Harry," she told her friend and grabbed his hand to pull him along. He laughed as she did, which caused her father to chuckle at them.

Once in the kitchen, Ginny dropped Harry's hand and rushed up to her mother, wrapping her arms around her mother's waist. "Mum! We're home!"

"Ginny!" Molly returned her daughter's hug and then gave Harry one too. "I'm glad you're home."

"Thanks, Mum. And guess what? We finished and don't have to go back on Boxing Day. We can stay until it's time to take the train back," Ginny said excitedly, letting her little girl come out.

"Oh, I'm so glad," her mother told her with unshed tears in her eyes. Ginny enjoyed the moment, glad to have it back, pushing the loss of the other timeline from her mind.

"Dad's going to take us shopping, but we'll be back in a few hours," she informed her mother as she grabbed Harry's hand to pull him up the stairs. Ginny heard more chuckling behind her as she left the room. She wondered why her parents thought everything was so amusing.

Fifteen minutes later, the three of them were using the Floo to go to Diagon Alley. For the next three hours, Ginny had a lot of fun buying things, things she could never have normally afforded. She was happy she had taken her father, as he only glared at her once for

spending all the money she did. Harry seemed to be having a good time too, and that made the day just that much better.

Dinner that evening was a riotous affair, with all of her brothers there. Bill and Charlie had come home while Ginny and Harry had been out shopping. Fortunately, her older brothers seemed to accept Harry, at least after a few minutes and some glowing words from her father. Ginny was very glad for that.

The evening was spent wrapping gifts alone in her room, and then downstairs with her entire family. Even Percy seemed to have a good time. All in all, it was a wonderful Weasley evening.

Christmas morning, Ginny was awakened by Ron running downstairs shouting for everyone to wake up. It was typical Ron behavior, she thought as she got up, throwing on a sweatshirt and the first pair of jeans she could find. Deciding she probably had a minute or two, she also ran a brush through her hair. It was not that she was afraid of Harry seeing her with horrible hair, no, she wanted to look semi-presentable when her gift to her family and announcement were made. She still had a little fear about that, but she was also determined to go through with it.

Going downstairs, she saw that she was not the last one to come down, Bill and Charlie had yet to make it. Ginny grabbed a cup of hot chocolate and sat down beside Harry in the living room. She gave him a smile and was reassured when he returned it. He would be her friend and stand by her, no matter what happened. That is just the way Harry is.

When her oldest brothers joined them a few minutes later, chaos rained down on the living room. Gifts were passed out and opened with a frenzy. Ginny slowly opened hers, but she made sure she watched her family as they opened her presents. Charlie's silver flame-proof suit was the most unusual and garnered a lot of attention. From that exotic gift to the more mundane family-size self-stirring cauldron she gave her mother, all of her gifts were widely appreciated. They all looked at her with amazement, wondering how she got them all. Ron was the most vocal.

As her slightly older brother opened his present, he exclaimed. "A broom! I got my own broom!" He ran his hand over the shaft as he read the designation. "A Cleansweep Five. Very steady and stable, great for Keeping," he said softly, more to himself than to anyone else. After a few seconds of dreaming, he turned to her. "Ginny, it's not that I don't like this, because I do love it, but how? I mean how could you give this to me? No wait, what I really mean is..."

"Ron," she interrupted him. "I know what you mean, and I guess it's time for me to explain something to everyone." She looked down for a short moment to gather her courage before she looked around the room. Everyone, but her parents and Harry, wore a curious look. "Near the beginning of the school year, I read an interesting story in *Hogwarts: A History*."

"Not you too..." Ron said with exasperation as he rolled his eyes.

Ginny ignored him. "And in there I read a story, which I put together with a few things I've heard both here at home and at school. That gave me an idea that I researched in the library and finally figured out where Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets is."

"WHAT?!" Bill was the most surprised and vocal, although his brothers were not far behind him. "That's a legend."

Ginny smirked at him. "Bill, you of all people should know that most legends are built on some truth, even if it is very hard to determine."

"Or very small," he reluctantly added. "Very well, I'll concede it's possible, but how did you find it when no one else had? And what does it have to do with all the expensive Christmas presents?"

"Why, don't you like your Magic Detector, Bill?" she teased him.

"Very much! Not only is it practical, but it could save my life, as I can use it to find magic and still have my wand ready to protect myself. But you're not answering the question," he shot back. Charlie, Percy, and Ron agreed. The twins looked very curiously at her, but said nothing.

“Part of finding the Chamber was also figuring out what is in there, which I did -- a very old and very large basilisk.”

Silence ruled for several seconds until Charlie exclaimed, “A basilisk?! Please tell me you did not fight a basilisk.”

Ginny smirked. “OK, I did not fight a basilisk. How’s that?”

Charlie looked up as if asking for patience.

“I think you need to finish the story, Ginny, and put them out of their misery,” her father told her with a hint of humor in his voice.

“Right, so once I figured all of this out...”

“Wait!” Bill stopped her. “How did you know where it is? It’s never been found before.”

“I found it because I’m a girl, Bill,” she told him as if it should have been obvious. At her brother’s dumbfounded looks, she, Harry, and her parents laughed.

“And what does that have to do with it?” Bill asked through gritted teeth, his patience wearing thin.

“Everything, my brother, because the entrance is in a girl’s bathroom.”

Bill stared at her for a moment and then began to laugh. “And since all the Headmasters since it was last opened have been male and had no reason to go in there, they never found it.”

“Probably true,” Ginny agreed. “Anyway, once I figured it out, I created a magical contract splitting the work and the profits of the sale of the basilisk parts for potion ingredients. For my share, I kept a small part for me. That was how I could afford the presents.”

“And the rest?” Ron asked.

Ginny smiled at him and turned around and pulled an envelope off of the Christmas tree and handed it to her father. "I'm giving the rest to my family. We won't become rich off of it, but we won't have to worry about all the little things anymore."

Her father opened the envelope, pulling out a letter. He gasped as he read the short letter. "Really, Ginny?" Her mother gasped too as she read over her father's shoulder.

"Yes, Dad. That's the first check, which has been deposited in the family vault. More is coming over the next year or so."

"What does it say, Dad?" Ron asked with excitement.

"It says 'Happy Christmas Weasleys' on a deposit slip of 3840 Galleons," he said with some excitement. He looked her right in the eye and opened his arms. Ginny did not hesitate and ran the few steps over to him and let herself be pulled into a hug, a hug that was also joined by her mother.

"Oh, Ginny," her mother crooned, unable to keep the sniffles out of her voice.

"That is very commendable of you, Ginevra," Percy told her.

Ginny smiled at her stuffy brother. "Thank you, Percy. I'm sure you would have done the same thing if you'd had the opportunity." Percy nodded, then glared at Ron when he snorted.

"You knew about this, Dad," Fred commented, looking very serious.

"Yeah, you were really only surprised at the amount," George added.

"Yes, boys, I was. Someone had to sign the contract for Ginny," her father explained.

Ron turned on her. "That's why you stayed at school, wasn't it?"

Ginny nodded. "Professor Dumbledore killed the basilisk a little after everyone left on the train, and then we spent as many hours as we

could after that cutting up the snake for ingredients, packaging it, and storing it all off. Harry and I assisted Professor Snape."

"Snape? You worked with Snape?" Charlie asked with incredulity.

"That's Professor Snape," Percy corrected his older brother, "and I'm sure it was an educational experience."

The twins snickered, but said nothing after the glare their mother sent them.

"Actually, it was," Ginny agreed. "He's changed a lot over the last month or so. He'll never be our best friend," all of her brothers except for Percy snorted at that statement, "but he was civil and we learned a lot from talking to him while we worked."

"Who do you suppose had the worst bite?"

"Tough one, bro. The snake was more venomous but the professor was alive."

"Boys!" their mother barked, and the twins instantly shut up.

"How big was the snake?" Bill asked with curiosity.

"What did he say, fifty-seven feet?" Ginny looked at Harry, who nodded.

"Merlin's ba--"

"Bill!"

Ginny had to stifle a giggle at her mother stopping Bill's comment.

"That's why you spent so much time in the library," Percy said, suddenly piecing it all together.

"That was some of it," Ginny agreed as she looked to her father, who nodded in understanding.

“Oh?” Percy looked at her for the rest.

Her father cleared his throat. “I believe now would be a good time for another announcement.”

“What are you going to do with the money, Dad?” Ron asked.

“Let it sit in the vault for now, Ron.” The boy looked disappointed. “I have a new topic, Weasleys.” They all looked at him, wondering what else was new. “It is with pride that I can announce that Ginny has done exceptionally well this last term, so well that the Headmaster has decided that she will join the second year classes when the new term begins in a couple weeks.” He beamed as did her mother. Harry was smiling at her, while her brothers were staring at her in surprise, although Ron’s expression was slowly changing, and not for the better.

“Congratulations!” everyone told her, all except for one.

“You just had to do it, didn’t you,” Ron told her scathingly. “I can’t have anything of my own. Not my classes, not my friends, nothing!” He scrambled up and ran towards the stairs.

“Ron!” his father called after him, but the boy stomped up the stairs, and a moment later they all heard a door slam.

“Well, that didn’t go so well,” Ginny softly said. Harry softly snorted and she looked at him.

A sigh escaped her father. “I believe your mother will have breakfast ready in a few minutes, so everyone go in and help set the table.” He looked at her mother. “I’ll go tell Ron breakfast is ready.” She nodded as he got up.

Breakfast was a quiet affair, although there was discussion about the presents and what everyone liked. An hour later, her father came back down the stairs with Ron trailing behind him. Ron looked around and nodded at everyone except for Ginny. Ginny was sad at her brother’s reaction, although she did understand. At least he was ignoring her for the moment instead of shouting.

((A/N: While I haven't finished writing the story yet, based on what I do have and my outline, it appears we're over halfway done. The final count will probably be 14 or 15 chapters, depending on how verbose I am and where I split things.))

Chapter 9 - Escape

On the train back to Hogwarts, Ginny had time to think, as Hermione was reading a new book she had received for Christmas, while Ron and Harry were each leaning against the wall, asleep.

This next term should not be too hard, she thought. All she really had to do was to not make any mistakes such as showing off her advanced abilities, as she had in front of Harry. There were no tasks that had to be done before this summer, and she was glad of that.

In fact, she supposed all that really mattered was being a friend to Ron and rebuilding that relationship. As things were now, he was ignoring her. In a way, it was rather ironic. She was having to play the role that Ron should have been playing for her: the comforting older sibling.

The bright spot was that Harry was still her friend; they were getting along well, and now they would be in classes together.

Another small positive was that Hermione was happy for her “promotion”. The brunette did not have a close friendship with Lavender or Parvati, while she and Ginny got along reasonably well. From her experience in the other timeline, Ginny knew they could become very good friends, so Ginny's move to the second-year dorm room should not be a problem.

She had just come to all of these conclusions when the door to their compartment opened. She saw Hermione look up and her eyes widen, so Ginny quickly looked up. There stood Draco Malfoy. Ginny quickly drew her wand, and before Malfoy could say anything, she calmly asked, “Did you forget our agreement, Malfoy?” From his expression, it was obvious Malfoy had either forgotten or did not care. “You know,” she went on before he could insult anyone, “you leave me and my friends alone, and you get to live a normal life?”

“Really, Weasley,” he drawled, “that’s not a threat. You can’t do anything to me.”

“No, it was a reminder of a threat, but if you’d like a threat, how about this? If you don’t leave in the next three seconds, I’ll let you find out that my Bat-Bogey hex can be applied to other openings than your nose.” Ginny let her wand slowly move downward until it was pointed at his waist. The boy gulped. “Quietly close the door and leave,” she told him in a soft but firm tone. Malfoy obeyed and the four Gryffindors were alone again. Harry and Ron had slept through the intrusion.

Hermione stared at her friend. “Ginny,” she whispered, still trying to let the boys sleep. “You can’t threaten people like that. It’s not right.”

Ginny let out a deep sigh as she put her wand up. Apparently, her friend still did not understand and Ginny was not sure she could get her friend to understand any time soon. Despite their encounter with Malfoy and his goons in the corridor a couple of months ago, Hermione had not had enough conflicts with Death Eaters or Death Eater wanna-bes. “Hermione, let me ask you a question. Given what you know about Malfoy’s personality, what would it take for him to act civil and be polite to us? He doesn’t have to be friendly, just civil.”

“I don’t know, but threatening him is not the answer. It didn’t work last time.”

“My last threat kept him civil towards us for a couple of months, which had never happened before ... but back to my question. I challenge you to come up with an answer to my question, with the restriction that the answer may not contain the idea of going to an adult for help.”

“But that is the most obvious way to solve it, Ginny.”

A quote from a Muggle author popped into Ginny’s head and she could not resist. “I believe that is a usage of the word ‘solve’ with which I was previously unfamiliar.”

“Huh?” Hermione looked confused.

“No, Hermione, getting an adult is not the best way to solve the problem of Malfoy. No adult will do a thing about it. Malfoy’s parents

won't, as that's where he learned the behavior from. Our Professors won't, as otherwise they would have already done so. Our parents won't, because he's not their child. Therefore, no adult will correct Malfoy and get him to act the way he should. So I ask you again, how does one get Malfoy to act civilly and politely?"

Hermione stared back, slowly biting at her lower lip. Ginny let her think about it, hoping her friend would understand. She was surprised by what she heard next.

"Why do you think you know the answer?"

Ginny had to be careful, lest she give away her secret. "I'm not absolutely certain I do, but I've grown up with six older brothers, so I've seen almost every behavior there is at one time or another. If that's not enough, I've met other bullies before, and that's what Malfoy is -- a bully."

Hermione slowly nodded. "I've met them too when I went to my Muggle primary school, and I never could figure out what to do." She paused, deep in thought, probably reliving a memory, Ginny thought. "So, what is the answer, Ginny?"

"My best answer is that you have to use negative reinforcement and speak to him in a language he will understand. I think there is a phrase that says 'might makes right'; that's what they understand."

"So you have to act like them? I'm sorry, I won't do that," Hermione said adamantly.

"Then you'll never be rid of bullies."

"But that makes you just like them."

Ginny quietly chuckled. "You sound just like our Headmaster." Hermione seemed to preen, sitting up a little straighter. "A person who is quite smart, but will not do the right thing in this area."

"How can you say that about him, Ginny?"

“Because, as I said, a bully only understands his own language, and don’t get all huffy with me,” Ginny said as her friend took a deep breath to refute her. “If Dumbledore did know the right thing to do and did it, then Malfoy would be cured instead of being a bully at school.” Hermione seemed to deflate in the face of that logic. “Also, Hermione, just because I ‘speak’ Malfoy’s language does not mean I’m just like him or act like him. He enjoys pushing people around for his own advantage. I only push him back to where he belongs to keep him in check and I don’t like doing it. What makes us different is our intent. If you want to think of it if this way, I’m the ruler slapping the back of his hand to show him he’s doing the wrong thing. If he’ll do the right thing, I’ll happily stop slapping his hand.”

Hermione looked at her calculatingly, but said nothing. Ginny hoped her friend would eventually come to the right conclusion. She let her friend stew over that while she thought about what must happen during the coming summer, and how she could minimize any damage.

The news that Ginny had changed years spread like wildfire through the Gryffindor Tower that evening. Most people were pretty understanding, even her “old” first-year dorm mates. They had seen first-hand how easy classes were for her. The few that were not happy for her just ignored her, which suited her just fine. The only person actively against her was Ron, but she was going to try to work on that.

Ginny was pleasantly surprised at how welcoming Lavender and Parvati were. After a few minutes of talking to them, she started to understand that they saw Ginny as another person to gossip with. While that activity was not Ginny’s favorite hobby, it was fun at times. Perhaps she could bridge the gap between those two and Hermione.

Her classes went well, with her teachers understanding that she might be a little behind as she had missed the first term, but she kept up and had no problems. Even Snape did not give her problems, although he did not cut her any slack, expecting her to know everything a second year should at this point. His snarkiness had

really mellowed over the last few months and Potions was going better for everyone.

When she could, Ginny partnered with Harry in class, although that did not always happen. Sometimes he actively sought out Ron and she let him, partnering with Hermione in those classes. He needed that relationship, at least as long as Ron would be normal around him.

The bright side of it all was that Ron was slowly allowing Ginny to be around him without acting like a jealous prat. It seemed that his seeing her in class and doing well helped to ease the tension, since he could see that her promotion was actually justified. Ginny thought that maybe, just maybe, they would be like normal brother and sister again by the end of the school year.

January turned into February and everything continued to go well for Ginny overall. Two minor problems had cropped up, but she had yet to figure out exactly what she wanted to do about them.

The most obvious was that Malfoy was starting to ignore her threat again and he had started insulting people again. The hard part in dealing with him was figure out how to “slap him” hard enough as negative reinforcement without going overboard and just sending him out on a wild goose chase that ended up at the Acromantula lair in the Forbidden Forest.

The other minor problem that irked her was Lockhart. He still was not really teaching Defense. She was stuck on what to do with him, too.

On the one hand, she could just challenge him to a duel, and her beating the professor should open some eyes about his non-ability. The obvious drawback to that was the attention that would bring to her and her “too advanced” abilities.

On the other hand, she could go talk to McGonagall and clue her in, but she had a feeling that would not help any. After all, there was no guarantee that McGonagall could do anything to make the class better, and who would replace him? Surely McGonagall and Dumbledore already knew how bad Lockhart was.

On the third hand, she paused and smiled as she realized the absurdity of that expression, she could take a page from Hermione's book and convince Harry to start the DA this year as a study group for the second years. The older students would not be interested, as Harry was not old enough yet, nor had he gone through all the trials to prove himself as he had in the other timeline by his fifth year. At the moment, ignoring Lockhart and starting the study group seemed like the best option.

Fortunately for Ginny, Lockhart provided her with a way to "slap" Malfoy and get away with it. On the morning of Valentine's Day, Lockhart made his announcement about the singing Valentines. She suddenly realized the singing Valentines could be put to a good use for her, in contrast to their more normal use.

Grabbing a quill and some parchment, Ginny madly worked on her "Valentine". Another devious idea came to her, and she started working on a second. She knew her "victim" would understand, and it would be better than in the other timeline. After a few minutes, she took her two folded parchments with names on the outside and two Sickles up to Lockhart. As luck would have it, they had Potions today, so she could watch both of her victims.

Ginny went through Potions with a smile on her face, anticipating the event. Harry had asked her what was going on, but she just smiled at him and whispered to be patient. Nothing was going to stop her from enjoying this.

When class let out, she made sure she was not too far away from Malfoy. Down the corridor from the Potions classroom, she saw a dwarf dressed like a scruffy Cupid come running down the hall. Harry moved to the side of the hallway in fear, and to his relief, the dwarf raced past him. Ginny could not help but laugh at that, much to Harry obvious displeasure.

Harry's attention, and that of everyone else, quickly moved to Draco Malfoy. The strong dwarf had rushed up to him and pinned him against the wall with one hand so he could not get away. Opening the parchment in his other hand, the "singing dwarf" started to chant:

Your hair is so light,
It gives me a fright,
To think that you might,
Not be very bright.

If your common sense does not abound,
And you turn your ideals all around,
You sadly will be found,
Six feet under the ground.

The dwarf stepped back. "Happy Valentine's Day," his bass voice said as Malfoy crumpled to the floor.

Malfoy looked around from his sitting position. Ginny caught his eye and nodded slightly. His eyes widened and he paled. She was sure her message had been received.

Looking pleased with himself, the dwarf put that parchment away and pulled out another. He calmly walked her way until he was standing directly in front of Harry. Now the boy paled, although he did not run, knowing it would be futile. The dwarf cleared his throat and actually tried to sing, but it came out as a croaky warble.

You're eyes are so green,
They make me to dream,
Of your love so divine,
I can't wait 'til it's mine.

With a smile and a deep voice, the dwarf told Harry, "Happy Valentine's Day," before he left.

Ginny saw that Harry looked relieved. She figured he was happy it was not any worse. Unable to help herself, she pulled out her Valentine card and handed it to him. "For you," she simply said.

Harry took it and opened it. It said the same thing the dwarf had just "sung". "Ginny?!" he said in an unbelieving tone.

She could not help the devilish grin that split her face. "Sorry," she said, even though she clearly was not. "The opportunity for the prank was just too much for me to resist."

He looked at her for a moment and she wondered what he was thinking. Suddenly, he started chuckling. "That was good, although not very subtle." She shrugged. "At least I didn't get a death threat," he said with a smile.

"No, Harry you're not in that category of friend." She glanced around and saw that most everyone had started moving away. Most importantly, Ron and Hermione had left for their next class, so she took a chance. Standing up on her tiptoes, she gave Harry a quick kiss on the cheek. "You're in a category all of your own."

She started walking away and had taken half a dozen steps before she realized Harry was not following. Stopping, she turned around and saw that Harry had not moved and he had a gobsmacked look on his face. "Are you coming Potter, or are you just going to stand there and be late to class?"

Harry looked at her, as if seeing her for the first time. A smile slowly came over him as he started to walk. "Coming, Weasley."

Ginny was not sure, but she suspected that she had officially just changed from being "Ron's sister" to "a girl", or so she hoped. Her heart did a jig as they walked to their next class together.

Ginny had a little more fun with Harry that evening after dinner. She got his attention and waved him over to a secluded spot in the common room. Since it just happened to be Valentine's Day, he blushed a brilliant red, which stayed strong when she put up a privacy spell.

"Hey, Harry?" she said quietly, "I need a favor."

He was still red, but managed to maintain eye contact now. "What?"

“Since Lockhart is doing such a poor job at teaching anything worthwhile, I think you need to start a study group to teach Defense,” she suggested.

His reaction was the expected one. He looked surprised and sputtered for a moment. “W-what? M-me? Why would you think I could do that? You’d be a much better choice.”

Ginny sighed; she was going to have to explain it all. “Look Harry, there are three very important reasons for you to do this. First, and most importantly to both of us, I can’t do it. I can’t be in the spotlight and draw attention to myself. We can’t risk me getting caught so our mission is not completed. Also, no one should believe that I can do this, because I’m really a first year who jumped a grade, so I shouldn’t know enough to do this.”

“But I don’t know enough either,” he shot back.

“That leads me to the second reason. You’re good at Defense, Harry. I’ve seen the way you do spells in your other classes and I know from the other timeline that you have the ability. Look at what you did in your first year.”

Harry shook his head in denial. “No, I was lucky, that’s all.”

“Some people say that luck is made. You, as a first year, stood up to a full-grown wizard with Voldemort in attendance too.” This was laying it on a little thick, but she thought he needed to hear it. “You understood what to do and did it, and you also knew when to let others help. That’s important, Harry.”

“But I can’t teach...”

“Maybe not this second, but I think you can do it when you want to. Also, I’m not asking you to lead a big class,” not yet, she told herself. “Just lead a small study group. You know, we look at the normal second year DADA book and work through it, not the trash Lockhart has forced us to buy so he becomes richer.”

"I don't know, Ginny," he said without confidence, suddenly finding his hands interesting.

"Lastly, you need this, Harry." He looked up at her, staring intently. "You need this, Harry, because you don't know what the future will bring. I'm helping you with the Voldemort problem for now, but you may have to do part of it and you need to be prepared. Also, Voldemort has helpers, Death Eaters and sympathizers; you don't know if you'll run into them. What will you do if you basically skip a year of Defense? I'll help you as much as I can, but what if you're attacked when I'm not around? You know you need this." She was not sure why he was so hesitant; this was not like her Harry.

Harry seemed to alternate in looking at her face and his hands, as if flip-flopping in his mind. "It would be stupid of me to be caught unaware," he finally said. He sighed. "Look, I agree that I need to know this. I'm just not sure about leading it. Wouldn't Hermione do a better job?"

Ginny purposefully kept still, instead of hitting her head on the wall or else hitting him, hoping to slap some sense into him. "Hermione is very smart, but you're smart too and a better teacher, Harry. Trust me, I've seen both of you teach and you are better. You also don't have to lecture or anything like that. Just read the book, explain what the spell is, how it can be useful, and then demonstrate it for us so we can learn it too."

"That doesn't sound too hard, I guess," he said tentatively. "But, uh, where would we do this? Maybe in that 'Come and Go' room you told me about?"

Yes, she mentally shouted in celebration and smiled at him. "While that would work, I think it might be better to keep that a secret for ourselves, at least for the time being. There are plenty of unused classrooms."

He nodded. "One of those would work." He thought for a moment more and the uncertain look returned. "Who all are you suggesting for this? There's not going to be a, a big crowd for this, is there?"

Ginny gave him a reassuring smile. "No, I was thinking of just the second year Gryffindors for now. Once we get the hang of it, we can expand it to second years in Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Maybe Millicent and Tracey in Slytherin would work, but I think they should be approached last. Definitely not Malfoy and his gang."

"No," he said with a smile, relaxing again. "Definitely not Malfoy and those like him." His smile turned into a big grin. "Millicent has been pretty good about bringing her snake to dinner, hasn't she?"

"Yes she has," Ginny grinned back. The Slytherin girl was still bringing out her slowly-growing green snake at random times, making sure Draco would suddenly see it, usually up close. Ginny suspected it was one of the reasons Draco had kept a little more to himself in the month before Christmas.

Harry's face became a little more neutral. "So, you really think I can do this teaching thing?"

"Yes," she answered confidently. "I know you can do this leading thing where you teach us Defense. Start slowly with the study group, but you will be good at it, Harry, because you're already a leader. Trust me."

He nodded, looking more confident now.

She pulled out a book. "Here. I checked this out from the library for you."

Harry took it and flipped through it. "I guess we can do a one or two spells a week," he said as he looked through the first chapter again. "Can you find us a place to meet?" She nodded. "All right, we can do this. How about the first meeting is in a week?"

"You'll be brilliant, Harry," she told him with a smile. She took down her privacy spell and stood. When he did too, she stepped forward and gave him a hug. "Thanks, Harry."

He slowly patted her on the back. "Er, sure."

When they let go and started going back to their usual table, she saw Ron looking at them with a disapproving look. Ginny ignored him. She was amused to see Hermione giving them a calculating smile. That caused Ginny to blush slightly and Hermione to smile a little more. As long as romance was all Hermione thought Ginny was after, then she was fine with that.

A week later, all nine Gryffindor second-years met in the nearest unused classroom to their Tower. Harry discussed why they were meeting and that he hoped they would learn what Lockhart should be teaching them but was not. Even though Hermione frowned a bit at that statement, she was very attentive to Harry when he started teaching them about the Disarming spell. By the end of the evening, all of them were able to do a basic Disarming spell, although some of them only had it work if their opponent was holding their wand very loosely.

The look on Harry's face showed he considered the class a success, and she noticed that he started paying less attention in Lockhart's class and more attention to the book she gave him. Hermione disapproved of that, but Harry ignored her. Hermione stopped nagging Harry when Ron asked the brunette who was helping them protect themselves more: Harry or Lockhart? Ginny gave Ron a hug for that, and he smiled at her -- the first time since Christmas.

For the rest of the year, Malfoy did ignore them, Ginny was pleased to see. The Slytherin was still nasty at times to firsties in the other houses, but when she caught him doing it, she just glared at him and he suddenly found something else he needed to go do.

She was also pleased when she realized that Harry was more at ease around her. It had taken several weeks after Valentine's Day for her to notice, but the signs were there. He seemed to treat her a little better than he did Hermione. It was a good start.

Harry had also worked harder on his studies and was now solidly in third place in the Gryffindor academic standings for the second-years,

right behind Hermione and herself. Ginny let Hermione have first place, but made sure she was a very close second.

One of the other highlights of the term was that Ron was now speaking to her again and even acting friendly. She would probably never know, but she thought that the final impetus for him changing had been when she was helping him with his homework. She thought it had forced him to see that she really deserved her promotion. The fact that she had not been all uppity like Percy had probably helped.

The most interesting highlight of the term had been the day after exams were over. That was when the Chamber of Secrets was officially opened. The seventh years had been abuzz about it as they worked on it, but now, everyone else was allowed in to see it. Ginny was glad it clean now, or at least most of it was. Part of it was still natural, including an area that was walled off. That was where the rest of the basilisk parts were, but she and Harry were the only students who knew that.

At the moment, they were all getting on the train to head home for the summer. Everyone was upbeat and looking forward to the break from school, except for Harry. He was looking depressed. After they got settled into a compartment, with her sitting next to Harry, and Ron and Hermione sitting on the other side, she waited until Ron and Hermione were arguing about what extra classes to take next year before she tackled this problem.

“Harry? What’s wrong?” she softly asked.

He did not say anything for a moment. “What’s always wrong at the end of the year,” he murmured.

That puzzled her for a second, until a memory came flooding back to her. “Oh bloody hell, I forgot. I’m so sorry, Harry.”

“Ginny!” Hermione exclaimed. “It’s bad enough with Ron doing it, but not you too? What would your mother say?”

She almost said that she did not “effing” care what her mother would say, but held it back at the last moment as she felt that her friend

would not take the joke the way it was meant. "Hermione, they're just words and in this case, very appropriate."

"Why? What's going on?"

Ginny was not sure what to say, and a glance at Harry seemed to indicate that he really did not want it known. "I made a promise to think about something and I'd forgotten to do so, which is really quite wrong of me. If you'll excuse me, I need to do some thinking."

"About what, Ginny? If you tell us, maybe we can help," Hermione offered.

Ginny did her best to smile at her friend. Her heart was in the right place, but she really was just too nosy sometimes. "Thanks, Hermione, but it's kinda personal. I just need some quiet time."

Hermione seemed to understand enough to stop questioning her. Ron gave her a strange look, but said nothing. Harry's look was the most interesting, as he looked grateful. That gave her hope that she had not messed up too badly with him.

Ginny leaned back and closed her eyes to think. She racked her brain for over half the trip on ways to get Dumbledore to let Harry stay with them, or anywhere else for that matter. Every idea she had, she also shot down, easily guessing what Dumbledore's reply would be. However, focusing on the "why" part of Harry's reason to be at the Dursleys started to yield results. Half an hour before they arrived in King's Cross, Ginny felt like she had it all worked out. Even better was that the needed action required magic no second year should know, so there was no way they could place the blame on her.

As their train trip neared the end, they all took turns using the loo, so as not to have a problem during the trip home. Ginny managed to get Harry alone for a minute.

"Harry, I know what to do, but you're going to have to trust me, OK?"

He gazed into deeply into her eyes, as if judging her. "I do."

Those simple words warmed her heart. "All right, here's the plan. Go home with the Dursleys, do whatever you have to to stay out of trouble with them. Don't unpack either. You'll go to bed there, but I predict you will not finish the night there, as Dumbledore will come get you to take you away. If I'm wrong in my guesses, you'll have to spend a few days there, but it will be less than a week -- and I think you will never need to go back."

He raised an eyebrow. "How do you know?"

Ginny was saved from answering by Hermione returning. She quickly reached down and grabbed his hand and gave it a squeeze. "Trust me." Letting go, she left for the loo. When she returned, all was normal, except that Harry was watching her a little more carefully.

At the train station, she watched him leave with his uncle and aunt. She really wanted to Apparate to their house and set it on fire, as it would accomplish the same purpose, but she could be suspected of that, as there was an easy spell to start a fire. Maybe if she used matches and petrol, she mused. She shook her head; no, the first plan was the better one. Twelve hours, Harry could survive twelve hours there this summer. Knowing that he had done so in the last timeline gave her comfort as she left the station with her family.

The alarm went off at one in the morning, causing Ginny to shoot out of bed as if she had been pranked. She was glad she had put all of the silencing charms on her bedroom. Shutting the alarm off, she quickly got dressed. A little charms work had turned a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved blouse black. Looking in the mirror, she decided to turn her hair black, as well as pull it up into a bun on the back of her head. If she was seen, and the plan was not to be, she needed to make sure she was not immediately recognized. Drawing her custom wand, she Apparated to number 6 Privet Drive.

Ginny was thankful the war had not restarted yet, so there were no guards to deal with. With a silencing charm on her feet, she walked next door, easily walking through the wards on the house. They let her in as she did not have intent to harm Harry. On the contrary, she

had immense intention to help him, even if it was going to be in a destructive manner.

It only took a few minutes, but with careful searching, she found the main ward stone that the protective wards used. It was pretty much as she expected to find it. There were wards to look for intent to harm, along with some hiding wards, alarm wards, a power amplification ward, and identification wards that were based on Harry. These last ones were the famous “blood wards” she assumed. She had never seen anything like them before. There was nothing protecting the main ward stone, as bad guys should not have been able to get in this far. That was poor planning on Dumbledore’s part, Ginny thought.

Digging into her memory of wards from the other timeline, Ginny aimed her wand at the ward stone, built her power up, and attacked. She quickly and systematically overloaded and took down every ward, except for the alarm ward, in less than half a minute. She needed the alarm ward to stay up.

The alarm ward was probably going off, but it was hard to tell from here. Just to be sure, she hit the ward with a burst of magic before she quickly made her way back to number 6. Hiding behind a rock wall, so any revealing spells cast from number 4 would not find her, she waited.

After ten minutes of nothing, she was starting to get concerned. Maybe those were not the right wards, or else, maybe the Headmaster was out and so had not heard them. She decided she would wait for up to an hour before she gave up and left, to start implementing “Plan B” tomorrow.

Five minutes later, she heard a single Apparation crack. Finally, she thought, took him long enough. If this had been a real attack, Harry would already be dead. She shook her head at the Headmaster’s setup. Of course, she had inside information from the other timeline, and that had been invaluable in accomplishing this task.

Despite her desire to poke her head up and see what was happening, she stayed down. She did not want a “magic revealing spell” to find her or her wand. The wait was maddening, but she endured it.

Several minutes went by before she heard a knock on a door. She smiled as she thought of the upcoming conversation, a conversation she was going to try to listen to. A long moment later, she heard a door open and some heated whispers, but the words, "Get in," were plainly audible. When the door closed again, she came out of her hiding place and ran for the windows of the living room. Hiding in the bushes, she quickly did a listening spell on the window above her. It was the same spell her brothers "Extendable Ears" would eventually be based on.

"No, I don't know what's happening!" she heard shouted, her spell hardly necessary to hear Harry's uncle.

"But something must have happened," Dumbledore said very calmly. "The magic that protects your family and Harry is gone."

"Why should I know about your freaky things? You come wake me in the middle of the night and demand to know about freaky things I have no knowledge of. You are clearly insane! I've had enough! Since the your main reason for making the boy stay here is gone, take the boy and yourself and be gone. I'm tired of all of his freakishness, your freakishness, and we just want to be quit of the lot of you." There was a pause and then Vernon Dursley yelled, "Boy! Get down here right now and bring all of your freakish things with you."

"Mr Dursley, I assure you..." But Ginny never got to hear what Dumbledore was so certain of.

"Boy! That's right, bring your trunk too. And that owl, where's the ruddy owl?" Dursley demanded.

"She gone, I sent her away earlier," Harry meekly answered.

"Good! Now take your freakish things and leave this instant, and take the old man with you before I call the authorities. I can't believe you so-called people, waking us honest normal citizens up in the middle of the night because some little bell went off." Dursley ended his tirade with a bellow. "Go on! Leave and never come back you freaks!"

“Come Harry,” Dumbledore said. “Let’s return to Hogwarts for the rest of the evening. I shall have to find a place for you in the morning.”

Taking that as her cue to leave, Ginny Apparated back to her bedroom as quietly as she could. A few spells later, her hair was her normal color, as were all of her clothes. She settled into bed with a sense of satisfaction of a job well done, not to mention with the soft giggle of a prank well pulled.

While Ginny ate breakfast, her mind was whirring with ideas of what might have to be done next for Harry. That was rather harder than it normally was, as her body was tired from its interrupted sleep. But for Harry, a little discomfort was something to be pushed aside. Life was unfair enough for him as things were.

Ron was quiet, but then that was normal for him, as he was shoveling food into his mouth at his usual high rate. The twins were in some secret discussion, their conversation in whispers. They were, no doubt, working on a prank. She wondered if they might even be working on the first version of their Canary Crème.

That reminded her that she would need to prompt Harry to give them an investment in a couple of years, since he would not have the Triwizard Tournament winnings. He would not be in that bloody event if she could help it.

A knock on the back door startled her. She started to get up and get it, but her mother was already on her way. Ginny hoped she knew who it was. The greeting told her everything she needed to know.

“Oh, good morning, Professor. What brings you here this morning?” her mother asked.

“Good morning, Molly. May we come in?”

“We? Oh, Harry, dear! Yes, please, do come in.” Her mother moved back and Ginny saw the two visitors come in; the smaller one was dragging a trunk. Her mother also engulfed Harry in a hug. When she

released him, she turned back to the Headmaster. "Albus, I thought you said it would be at least a month before he came over." She looked down at the boy. "Not that I'm not glad to see you, Harry dear, and you're always welcome, but I am surprised." Her mother was rambling; she must have really been caught by surprise, Ginny thought.

"Yes, well, I was quite surprised to be woken by my alarms going off last night, telling me that the wards around Harry's house had fallen."

"Oh dear," her mother exclaimed. "Was there trouble?"

"Fortunately, Molly, when I arrived, everything was peaceful and nothing was amiss, except for the fallen wards which I am unable to reestablish due to the lack of a certain item. After I woke the Dursleys to find out what had happened, they summarily threw Harry out of the house and I was unable to talk them out of it."

"That's easy to fix, Albus. Harry can stay here," Molly said, as if that should settle everything. "I'm sure Ron would like his friend to stay and it would be no trouble at all," her mother offered.

"Splendid, Molly, that would be a relief. I can add to your existing wards as well."

"Of course, I'm sure Arthur would appreciate that." She stopped for a second looking at Harry. "Oh heavens, where are my manners. Harry, would you like to stay with us? I really don't mean to assume..."

"No, it's all right, Mrs Weasley. I'd like to stay here if you don't mind," Harry told her.

"Of course not, Harry dear. You just take your stuff up to..."

Ginny was sure she was about to say "Ron's room", so she jumped in and interrupted her mother. "I'll help him take his stuff up to Bill's old room again, just like last time." She jumped up and went over to Harry's trunk and grabbed one end. "Ready Harry?" she asked innocently.

“Er, yeah, sure.” He grabbed the other end of his trunk and the two of them walked towards the stairs.

There was no reason, that Ginny could think of, for her mother to put Harry into Ron’s room. As she had told her mother last year, Harry had a room of his own at the Dursleys, and Ron’s room was not big, so she was unsure as to why her mother wanted the two boys to share. Surely her mother realized that Harry needed some alone time away from Ron. The suspicious part of Ginny thought that maybe her mother wanted them to share so Ron could be sort of a chaperone, so she could not go sneaking into Harry’s room, and he could not go sneaking into her room without Ron noticing. She doubted her mother really thought that way, but Ginny did wonder at times.

She guided them into Bill’s room, down the hall from her room. “There ya go, Harry, all safe and sound.” She put her end of the trunk down and turned around to find him staring at her.

“You...” he started.

“Ssh,” she put her finger up to his lips. “I’m glad you’re here, Harry and away from them,” she said quietly.

Harry gave her the heart melting smile as he walked over to her, and for the first time, initiated a hug. “Thank you, Ginny,” he whispered into her ear. “I don’t know how you did it, but thank you.”

While she returned the hug, old emotions from the other timeline flooded her. She mentally cursed the fates for them not being at least two years older. Once she thought that through, she quickly apologized to the fates, because at least she was back with Harry again. Waiting two or three years to really be with him again was possible, and was better than never being with him.

As he let go, she reluctantly did too. “We’ll talk later, Harry,” she quietly told him and he nodded. “Let’s go back downstairs. I bet you didn’t get breakfast yet.”

He grinned. “I got a little something from the elves, but it’s nowhere near as good as what your mum makes.”

She smiled and led him back down. Dumbledore was still there.

"All settled in?" Mrs Weasley asked.

"I'm in. I'll settle this evening."

"Well, sit down and have some breakfast. I'm sure a growing boy like you needs more." Mrs Weasley shooed him towards the table, where Harry took a seat and served himself with only the slightest of hesitations.

Dumbledore chuckled. "Enjoy your summer, Harry. I'm sorry that things did not work out at your aunt's house. I'm sure that if you write her a letter, she will have cooled off by then, and you can work things out with her and move back in next summer."

When Harry did not say anything, Ginny did. "Why would he want to stay with people who hate our kind?"

"Ginny!" Her mother chastised her, but the girl did not break eye contact with Headmaster.

"Headmaster, I think you are under the mistaken impression that Harry's aunt and uncle view him as you view your family. However, nothing could be further from the truth." A glance at Harry, with him staring down at his plate, told her she needed to stop right there.

"Ginny, you apologize to the Professor for your disrespect, right now young lady," her mother ordered her.

She had really stepped in it, Ginny thought. Well, in for a Knut, in for a Galleon -- especially if she could fix a problem. "I'm sorry, Mum, but it's the truth and I don't think I should have to apologize for speaking the truth. I'm not trying to be mean or rude; my motivation is to help correct an error. I can safely share no more, but if you want to really know, go talk to Harry's relatives and casually say that you're a witch. While I don't know everything that was said last night," although she did, "I would think that the Headmaster can guess at their reaction based upon his conversation last night." Hoping she was not called

on her lie, "Harry told me they were not very pleasant." To her relief, Harry did not give any indication that he had not told her anything about last night.

"Alas, I'm sure they were not at their best, being wakened as they were," Dumbledore said congenially.

"If I may be bold, Headmaster, having watched you for the last year, I've noticed that one of your many good traits is that you trust people to do the right thing because it is the right thing."

"Thank you, Miss Weasley," he kindly said.

"But," Ginny continued, "that is also one of your weaknesses; you trust too much. Some people do not deserve your trust, because they have done nothing to earn it. Therefore, you ignore real problems and let people take advantage of you and others." She calmly watched him listen to her as she waited for the explosion she knew was coming.

"Ginevra Molly Weasley! You will apologize this instant and then go to your room until I come let you out!" Her mother was livid.

"I can list three examples without even trying hard," she said, ignoring her mother. That would increase the punishment, but she really did not care. If she could "fix" Dumbledore even a little, that would be worth it. To her amusement, Dumbledore smiled and pulled out a chair from the table and sat down. That silenced her mother.

"Please, Miss Weasley. I don't think I will agree with you, but it would be rude of me to ignore advice that was given in earnest, even from someone such as yourself," he told her with his usual calmness and grandfatherly smile. The implied "you're too young" message came through loud and clear, but that did not stop Ginny.

"The people under question are a good first example. As I understand it, you dropped Harry off with them twelve years ago without ever meeting them, and yet you assumed they would be good people and want to take care of Harry. Is that correct?"

Dumbledore tilted his head slightly, almost shrugging. "Close enough. You are correct that I had not met them before."

"Then how did you know what they thought of Lily Potter? You thought the best of them, that they accepted her and her magical identity like you did, and that they liked her well enough to care for her child sight unseen. Is that also correct?"

"It is," Dumbledore admitted.

She was ready for the kill now. "However, Headmaster, I challenge your assumptions, and because they are flawed, the end result is flawed. They not only did not accept Lily Potter's magical heritage, but they hated it. Because of that, they hated Harry. Your conversation with them last night was not unusual. People do not throw children out on the street like they did last night because they love them." Her mother gasped. "You trusted the Dursleys to do the right thing, but they did not because they hate our world and everything to do with it."

Dumbledore looked at her for a moment. "So you think that I do not understand Muggles."

"No sir, I wouldn't presume to guess on that. I'm saying that you don't understand the Dursleys and how they view us, which means that you will usually do the wrong thing in regards with them. In this case, you trusted them to do the right thing for Harry out of the goodness of their hearts and they never will. They would only do the right thing if you could convince them that an action, which is good for Harry, is in their best interest. Trying to make Harry go back there as things are now is the wrong thing to do, both for him and for the Dursleys. Their descriptions of Harry, his things, his owl, his parents, his friends and mentors, are all indications of how they feel. While getting them up in the middle of the night did not help the situation, the foundation of hate was already there. In summary, the Dursleys can not be trusted to do the right thing."

Dumbledore stroked his beard. "I'm still not sure I agree, but you do raise some interesting points to consider. You said you had other examples?"

“Yes sir. Professor Snape would be the next obvious one,” she said.

“Oh?” Dumbledore asked with an amused smile.

“While he has changed for the better recently, before then, you trusted him to do the right thing in regards to teaching at school. Yet, he betrayed your trust. The stories about him are legendary, legendarily bad, that is. You trusted him to be a good teacher, but he was not. If you had treated him according to school policies, you should have sacked him long ago.”

“You’re referring to his famous bias for Slytherin and against everyone else, I assume?” he asked kindly.

“That would be one area of concern. Until recently, he also did not actually teach Potions. He taught brewing. Ron could have taught Potions as well as Professor Snape did. Anyone can put a Potion recipe on the board and shout at students for making mistakes. Surely you’ve heard the stories, sir.” To her surprise, Ron and her mother both said nothing. A glance showed them to be gaping at her.

“I have, but I have my reasons for trusting, Professor Snape, Miss Weasley, although I can not share them with you,” he said as if that should explain everything.

“I’m glad you personally trust him, Headmaster, but I’m not really addressing personal trust. I’m addressing trusting him as a teacher around children. Before he changed at the end of last term, he abused your trust. If you don’t want to discuss his non-professional behavior in the classroom, then look at how he treated Harry. I was told, and not by Harry, that Professor Snape singled him out in the very first class, asking him Potion questions from the fourth-year and taking points off when he did not know. Professor Snape had an active dislike for all things Harry Potter and actively took those feelings out on Harry. That is also an abuse of trust in his teacher and mentor roles that all Professors are to have. Fortunately, Professor Snape realized the error of his ways and apologized for his behavior, which shows that he was in the wrong. My question to you, Headmaster, is how long would you have let that go? What if

Professor Snape never had stopped hating Harry? Would you have corrected this abuse of trust, and if so, when?"

Dumbledore looked pensive for a moment. "Professor Snape is a very complicated person, Miss Weasley. I can not force him to do anything. You said you had a third example?"

"So you choose to ignore your responsibilities as a Headmaster with Professor Snape?" Ginny was not about to let him change the topic for her.

"I can not answer why he did it."

"I'm not asking why he did it, Headmaster, I already know that as he said so in his apology. I'm asking why you let him abuse your trust? See, there is a pattern. As for the third example, I submit Draco Malfoy."

Dumbledore chuckled. "I assume you will say that I let Mr Malfoy have his way too often?"

"One might put it that way," Ginny replied with a slight smile of her own, "but I think I'd say that you assume he will follow the spirit of the school rules, and when he does not, you do not show him his error and help correct him, and so he abuses your trust and more rules."

"It is not my place to teach him right from wrong, Miss Weasley," Dumbledore countered.

Ginny wanted to bang her head on the table. He was so slippery about avoiding the real problem, she was starting to wonder if he had been in Slytherin house as a student. "No, Headmaster, you are correct. It is his parents' responsibility, but that is not what I'm trying to point out. The school has policies to show right and wrong, and we have laws to also help show right and wrong. You assume people will always follow them, or at least the most important ones. Malfoy abuses your trust by not acting civilly and also by acting criminally, and yet you do nothing. Therefore, he has no one to help him do the right thing, and many of us suffer for that."

“Criminally? Please explain.” Dumbledore was much more serious.

“Headmaster, I had to rescue two first-years from Malfoy and his two friends last year. I heard him threaten them, and he was one step from the assault he was threatening them with,” she explained.

The Professor relaxed. “Since nothing physically happened, there was no harm done; and with no harm, nothing can be proved.”

Ginny closed her eyes for a second in frustration. Perhaps this man was why the Wizarding world was in such sad shape. “Headmaster, don’t you see? He was trying to hurt them, and those two situations were the ones I stopped him from. He would have hurt them had I not happened upon the scene. How many others did I not see to prevent? How many accidents did students have that could not be explained from class exercises? There’s a good chance at least some of those came from Malfoy, or others like him.”

“But nothing can be proved, therefore my hands are tied.”

“I’m sure you’ve seen or heard him insult people. That’s against school rules as well. Why are those not enforced?” she asked.

“Miss Weasley, I must allow some stress to bleed off or things would be worse, although I don’t expect you to understand that,” he condescendingly explained.

“But it starts with the small stuff and works up. Today it’s insults and attempted assault,” she told her, her voice starting to rise in frustration, “tomorrow it’s full blown assault and rape of Muggleborns because he thinks he’s superior to everyone else,” she finished in a firm and rather loud voice.

“Ginny!” her mother cried.

She closed her eyes, realizing she had crossed a line. “My apologies, Headmaster, I did not mean to shout or be rude, that was merely my frustration coming out.”

Dumbledore nodded, accepting the apology. "You feel very strongly about this, don't you, Miss Weasley?" He was also giving her appraising looks.

"Yes, sir. I've been thinking about our world for most of the year," she said, hoping to cover at least some of her adult insights. She realized she had just given him more ammunition for watching her. "I've actually read history books in the library and I could not help but see how some of the things in there were happening in our school. Because the wizards felt superior to the Muggles in the early Middle-Ages, we did some very inhumane things to them, starting with insults, assault, and stealing. I know we've gotten a little smarter over time, but I do not think we've become any wiser. We make the same mistakes, only the victims have changed. When someone like Malfoy goes out of his way to hurt someone, whether by insult, fist, or spell, that will have consequences. At the very least, we will not have unity in the school, something the Sorting Hat has sung about. At worst, we'll have a mini-Civil War as the Death Eater children try to act like their parents while the rest of us fight back or cower. It all starts with abuse of trust and the abuse not being corrected." Ginny was tired now, if he did not accept her argument, then she could say she tried.

"You paint a rather dire picture of the school and your fellow students, Miss Weasley," Dumbledore commented.

She shrugged. "The end result I described won't happen next year, Headmaster, but if nothing changes, it will happen far sooner than later, maybe even before I finish Hogwarts. However, I would predict that if things get that bad, then Fate will either provide a correction, or else 'the good people' will leave and let Hogwarts die from internal rot." At his raised a bushy eyebrow, Ginny added, "There are too many examples in history, Professor, including some in the British Isles."

"I do not deny examples in history, I am merely surprised you would apply them to Hogwarts."

Ginny smiled. "I believe they say that those who do not pay attention to history are doomed to repeat it, or something like that."

Dumbledore chuckled. "Yes, something like that. Well, Miss Weasley, this has been a very stimulating conversation. I'm not sure I agree with what you've said, but your point was well argued and I shall consider it." He looked at her mother. "Molly, please do not be hard on her. I can tell that she meant no disrespect, and it is so rare for me to find someone who is willing to say that I have flaws I need to correct. I can only guess as to why that is, but it is refreshing to know that not everyone puts me on a pedestal. Where we in school, I'd give you twenty points for bravery and for paying attention to your History lessons, Miss Weasley."

The Headmaster stood. "Since everything seems to be in order now, I believe I shall continue on with my duties. I hope everyone has a good summer and that I shall see you on the first of September." He gave her a last look, a very contemplative one -- a look that internally filled her with dread of him discovering her secret. Damn! She had said far too much, her and her big mouth that wanted to fix everything. Harry got into trouble for trying to "save everyone"; she got into trouble for trying to "fix everyone".

As the Headmaster made his way to the door, her mother went after him profusely apologizing for her. She was so dead, but it had felt so liberating to tell the old coot all of that. She could only hope that he would change for the better.

"I don't believe it."

"Yeah, she dressed Dumbledore down and lived," her twin brothers started in on her.

"So far, but what will Mum do?"

The other twin gave a false shake of his body. "I shudder to think." They both snickered.

Ron was just staring at her, but Harry was the one who mattered to her. Looking over at him, she saw him looking at her very intently, as if evaluating her. After a few seconds, he gave her a smile.

"He's right," Harry said quietly. "That was well argued, but do you think he'll do anything about Malfoy, because the other two problems have already been fixed. I guess that shows that Fate will correct mistakes." The others laughed and Ginny had to join in, at least until her mother returned a few seconds later, with a very disapproving look.

"Ginevra Weasley, I've never been so embarrassed in all my life. I can't believe you said those things to him. The audacity to think that you know better than Albus Dumbledore -- a man more than ten times your age. Disgraceful!"

Ginny had to stop the tirade before she really got going. "Mum, he said he appreciated my honesty, and really, no one is perfect. He doesn't have to agree with my opinion, but I did tell him the truth as I see it. The facts in each of those three examples are completely true and he did not contest them. The only question was my opinion of what the facts mean. And as Harry said," (his name was always a good way to stop their mother from going too far) "Fate has already corrected two of my examples. Professor Snape is now acting like a normal teacher, and Harry does not have to live with people who hate him. If I'm right on two of them, why can't I be right on the third one too?"

"But to suggest that the Headmaster is responsible? Outrageous!"

"Mum, you knew last summer that Harry's relatives were not feeding him properly, along with putting bars on his windows and locks on his doors. What did you do?"

She sputtered for a moment. "I, well, I, I fed him. It was the right thing to do."

"Yes it was, Mum." Ginny skipped the question about why her mother did not do more about making sure Harry did not go back, as it would have only made things worse. "Professor Dumbledore knew what it was like at Harry's relative's house at the end of his first year, and yet he sent Harry back. He did not send him food or anything else to make Harry's life better. That proves my point that he trusted the Dursleys to do the right thing when they never would, and he had the

facts to know they would not. That's all I was trying to say, and I said it calmly and rationally. You've always said we could tell you anything as long as we were truthful and respectful about it. That's all I did with the Headmaster. Are you saying that rule no longer applies now that we're older?" It was a trap she hoped her mother fell for.

"Of course not, Ginny. We want you to always be able to talk to us about anything, but that was Albus Dumbledore," she protested.

"Mum, is there such a thing as a perfect person?"

Her mother exhaled sharply. "Ginny, I know what you're trying to say, but one does not correct Albus Dumbledore. He's the wisest person on our side. He's our leader, for goodness sake."

Ginny wanted to scream at the idea and that her mother was a 'sheep'. "But Mum, you just admitted that no one is perfect, so therefore, Professor Dumbledore can't be perfect either. And if people always treat him as if he's always right, then how will he know when he's making a mistake, just because everyone is too afraid to speak up?" She would have like to have said 'too much of a suck-up', but her point would have been lost as her mother went off the deep-end over her choice of words.

"That is not your problem, young lady," her mother firmly told her, apparently tired of the conversation. "Now, go de-gnome the garden for the morning, and be glad that is all the punishment you're getting. I would give you more, but the person you're putting down asked me not to," the matron said sternly.

"Mum, I did not put him down and I did nothing out of disrespect." When her mother glared at her, she gave in. "OK, I'm going, I'm going." She hurriedly left the table and went outside. She loved her mother, but the woman could be so stubborn and unable to think about anything new. Sort of like a gnome, she thought with a chuckle -- always doing the same thing in its own small little world.

Since her mother could not see her at the moment, Ginny pulled out her wand and pointed it at a gnome. She levitated it up and in front of her, and then she banished it as hard as she could. She was amazed

to see the gnome fly what appeared to be over fifty yards. Now that was some power, she thought with amazement. With the idea to permanently get rid of the gnomes, she did the same spell on each of the others she saw. It was not as satisfying as physically flinging the little creatures, but she would bet this would take care of the gnomes for a long while.

As she banished her eighth one away, she heard, "That's impressive." Turning, she saw three brothers and Harry.

"Not nearly as impressive as not getting a warning from the Ministry," the other twin added.

"One has to understand how the instruments work," Ginny cryptically answered as she put her wand up, not seeing any more of the little creatures.

"So, how do they work, little sister?" Fred asked.

"Go do your own research, big brother," she told him with an impish smile. She looked at her friend. "Harry, are you mad at me for what I said? I really tried not to betray your secrets, but Dumbledore had to know you couldn't stay there anymore."

Harry looked down for a moment, using the toe of his shoe to move dirt into a gnome hole for a moment. "No, Ginny, I'm not upset. I wish no one knew, but if him knowing would get him to change so no one else has to go through it, then I'm OK with that. Do you..." he paused and looked up at her. "Do you really think he'll change and try and fix things?"

Ginny leaned against a tree as she thought about the question. "I don't know. He is smart, and I can hope; but I really don't know."

"It would be nice though," Ron said. Everyone looked at him. "What? It would. I mean if Malfoy was civil all the time, we'd hardly ever fight. But he can't ever seem to keep his 'superior nose' out of every else's business."

Ginny chuckled. "That an interesting thing to say, Ron. If Malfoy was to act like the superior person he says he is, shouldn't he be ignoring us all as he's above us and too good for us? But he doesn't do that. Instead, he wades 'down here' with us, trying to tell us how bad we are. He's really not acting like he says he should."

"Ah, Ginny, I have a burning question now..."

"Yeah, how did you not get sorted into Ravenclaw?"

She looked at her twin brothers. "I guess because I'm so brave to say what I think and damn the consequences." They all laughed at that.

"Hey, let's go play Quidditch for a while," Ron suggested. The twins agreed. "Harry?" Ron asked. Harry looked at Ginny.

"Sounds good," she agreed, "but I better stay here. I shouldn't look like I'm having fun for a while."

"Why are you asking her for?" Ron asked his friend.

"Because I thought it was the nice thing to do, and because if she's not going flying, then I thought I'd sit here and keep her company," Harry explained as if it should have been obvious.

Ron gave him a strange look. "Do you fancy Ginny or something?"

Ginny wanted to kill Ron at that moment. If that stopped Harry's progress with her, she would hex her brother into the next century.

"Don't be stupid," Harry said a little hotly. "She's my friend and she just stood up for me. I can be a friend and keep her company. Besides, I want to talk to about something she said."

She was not sure how to take the first part of his statement, but given the last part, she chose to think that Harry meant that Ron was stupid for not being able to figure his motives out, which she did agree with. However she did wonder what he wanted to talk about. "It's OK, Harry. In fact, it's probably for the best that you go on," she said more

bravely than she felt. "Mum would wonder what's happening if those three are playing but she couldn't see you."

"You sure?"

Ginny was touched. He did seem to really care. "Yeah, I'm sure. We can talk later."

Harry finally nodded and left with her brothers, although it did seem a bit reluctantly. She appreciated him sticking up for her. She also appreciated the twins not acting like prats as Ron had. Of course, she could not tell the twins that, or they would start giving her a hard time.

Ginny sat under the tree and watched them fly, especially Harry. He had not yet had a chance to develop all of his moves yet, as he had later in the other timeline, but she knew he eventually would. That made her think about the conversation they were going to have to have this summer. She was not sure when the best time would be, but her intuition said that sooner rather than later was better. There were two sticky points that she was not sure how he was going to take, but life rarely gave you everything you needed. That thought made her laugh, she, who was given a chance to do part of her life over. Well, she did not have everything she needed, but she was working on it.

By the time she went to bed that night, she still had not talked to Harry alone. Something or another had come up every time they were alone for a minute. If she had not known better, she would have said people were trying to keep them apart, but she knew better. It was just life with eight people in a house -- busy.

((A/N: Well, what are the odds that Dumbledore will be keeping a closer eye on Ginny now? :-))

Chapter 10 - Mistakes and Corrections

Three days later, Ginny was starting to get really cranky from frustration. She and Harry had yet to sit down and really talk. Harry had found her alone for a few minutes the other day and asked his question. He had wanted to know if she was using her “other knowledge” when she had her talk with Dumbledore. She had told him that she had for a little of it, but not much. Before they could really discuss it, Ron came up and asked Harry to play chess, and their “talk time” was over.

In fact, she was getting so annoyed at their lack of privacy, she was considering doing something very unusual. Given the fact that this conversation could take several hours, and how unlikely it was they could talk that long without being interrupted, she went with her idea. That evening, instead of going straight to bed, she locked her door and pulled out her potions kit. Half an hour later, she had four doses of Pepperup potion.

The next day, she caught Harry alone for a minute and quietly told him, “We really need to talk about -- stuff.” He nodded and she was glad she could be vague. “Everyone is usually asleep by midnight. I’ll come to your room then and we can talk for as long as we need to. I’ve got enough Pepperup potion to get us through the next day, even if we never go to sleep.”

“You think it will take that long?” he asked incredulously.

“Probably not, but better safe than sorry.”

“OK. Say, you want to go flying? Maybe you can go now before your brothers stop you,” he suggested.

“Sure,” she readily agreed and led him out.

“I don’t understand why they give you such a hard time about flying. I mean, all of our chasers are girls, so that can’t be the reason why.” He looked at her.

She shrugged as they made it to the broom shed. "They're just being older brothers, Harry. No big deal. I'll show 'em."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, I'm sure you will. Say, you want to ride my Nimbus?"

"Oh yeah, that would be great." She quickly snatched it from him and took off. He laughed and followed. They both were laughing very hard half an hour later when her brothers came out and saw her flying as well as Harry could.

It seemed to take forever for midnight to come, but it finally did. The house was quiet, except for the occasional wind or a noise from the ghouls in the attic. Dressed in her normal clothes, she grabbed her potions and snuck into Harry's room. He had one candle lit and was still awake, reading a Defense book.

Ginny closed the door behind her and then put silencing charms all over the room. "Here." She gave him two of the phials and kept two on her.

"So, what do we need to talk about?" he asked shyly, and she understood. It was like they were breaking a bunch of rules or something, and as she thought about it, they sort of were. Getting caught like this by Mum or Dad would not be fun.

"Well, I need to tell you how things are now, what I've been doing, and what I think is left to do. Of course, if you have questions, I can try to answer those too."

Harry looked a little hesitant, but he asked anyway. "OK. So what do I need to know?"

She took a deep breath, and using her Gryffindor courage, went for it. "Let's start with a brief summary of relevant history." He nodded. "Not long before you were born, a prophecy was made. It predicted that a person would have the power to vanquish the Dark Lord. While it did not say who, it told how to determine who the person was. Looking at the clues, Dumbledore had both your parents and Neville's parents go into hiding. The Dark Lord found out about the first part of the

prophecy and decided it applied to you, so he tried to kill you. He killed your parents and gave you that curse scar as he tried to kill you, but he also lost his body too. There was one other result, but we'll get to that in a minute. With me so far?"

Harry looked a little peeved. "Yeah, this is what Dumbledore should have told me when I asked my question at the end of my first year, isn't it?"

"Yes. As I told you before, his defense is that he wanted you to have a childhood, as he was afraid that once you heard this, you'd start to train for fighting, maybe even dropping out of school," she explained.

"I can see that, but I think it should have been my choice."

"I totally agree," she told him, "but that didn't happen. Just as in this timeline, Dumbledore put you at the Dursleys to keep you out of the Wizarding public's eyes to attempt to give you a normal childhood. To help protect you, he put blood wards on your aunt's house, since she shared blood with your mother. They work because of the sacrifice and some spell your mother used. In this timeline, I got you out of there by destroying the blood wards. Since they can't be recreated without your mother's blood, which no one has, you can stay anywhere that's considered safe."

He grinned. "Thanks! Good work!"

"You're welcome," she told him magnanimously and did a modified curtsy since she was sitting down. "Back to my old timeline, you came to Hogwarts and had numerous adventures. Your first year in both timelines was the same. In my old timeline, each year of school, there was another attack by Voldemort or one of his followers. At the end of your fourth year, Voldemort managed to get a body back and the second war against him began. It ended about eight years later at the cost of almost everyone who fought against him and most of the British Wizarding world."

Harry gaped at her and moved his mouth, but nothing came out for a minute. He finally got, "Uh, wow..." out.

Ginny would have giggled at his response had she not been thinking about why she came back in time.

“So, that’s what happened and why I came back in time to change this. Obviously, I left a number of details out of that summary. There are a few we must discuss now. For example, one of the most important questions is: Why did Voldemort not die the night the Killing Curse rebounded on him? Once that is answered, and Dumbledore did in your sixth year, one can know how to kill the bastard. The answer to that question is that Voldemort, or Tom Riddle as he was called as a child, did a Dark ritual six times. He tried again the night he tried to kill you, and accidentally succeeded. Each of those rituals anchors him to this earth so that he can’t really die. Therefore, to kill him, we have to remove those anchors first, then you can kill him as the prophecy says you can.”

“Wait! Me, kill him?” Harry looked like he was panicking.

“Uh, yeah, sorry, I thought I said that when I mentioned the prophecy, but I guess I wasn’t clear. The exact wording isn’t important at the moment, but the focus of the prophecy is that you have to kill him. We can help you, and I am by removing all of the anchors, but the final act must be yours,” she told him.

“But I’m still a student, I can’t kill him! Everyone’s scared of his name and he’s a lot older than me...” He was rambling in his worry.

“HARRY!” she shouted to get his attention. He stopped and looked at her, fear written large on his face.

“Good thing I put up those silencing charms,” she smirked.

He nervously laughed, but still looked scared, not that she could blame him.

“Now, it’s not as bad as it sounds thanks to me. In the old timeline, all the bad stuff you were thinking was true.” Actually more as Dumbledore died early, but no need to tell him that now. “But in this timeline, your friend Ginny has made it easy on you and you’ll probably never have to face him at all.”

“Probably?” he asked with concern, although he was starting to relax a little.

“Almost certainly,” she assured him with confidence. “If you want a completely honest answer, I have to allow for magic, which can allow for strange things to happen, even to the point of sending people back in time,” she finished with a smile.

He laughed nervously again. “Yeah, good one. So, what now?”

Here comes the hard parts, she thought. “Remember those anchors I mentioned?” He nodded. “There are three left, but I know where all three are and how to get rid of them. Let’s start with the easy ones first, OK?”

“Uh, sure.”

“All right. Back to the night Voldemort tried to kill you, he was able to find your family because of a traitor, one of your parents’ best friends. In a strange twist of fate, they told everyone that your father’s best friend and your godfather...”

“I have a godfather?” Harry was surprised.

“You do. Your father’s best friend, Sirius Black, was held up as their Secret Keeper, the person who held the key to the spell that hid their house. Unbeknownst to everyone, they switched and made another friend the Secret Keeper; his name is Peter Pettigrew. As the name implies, as long as the Secret Keeper kept the secret, they would be safe. Also unbeknownst to everyone, Peter Pettegrew was a Death Eater and betrayed them, leading Voldemort to their hidden house.”

“That bastard!” Harry snarled. “What happened to him?”

“Be patient, I’m getting to that.” He bristled a little, but did not say anything, so she continued her story. “Peter tried to get away and Sirius tracked him down to bring him in. Unfortunately, Peter managed to surprise Sirius, killed twelve Muggles and made it look like Peter died too, framing Sirius for all of it, including your parents.

So at this moment, Sirius sits in Azkaban Prison for all the crimes. Peter is still alive and has been in hiding.”

Harry leaned forward, looking very intense. “Do you know where he is so we can get Sirius out?”

Here is where it gets really hard, she thought. “Harry, I’m truly sorry, but I’m going to have to pull a Dumbledore on you.”

He sat back up in surprise. “Huh?”

She sighed. “Yes, I do know, but we must leave him there for a few months longer.”

“What?!” he exploded, and again she was thankful for the silencing charms. “Are you insane! Damn it! How can you do that?”

Ginny held up her hand, and miraculously, he stopped shouting. She leaned forward, and as seriously as she could, she slowly said, “Harry, as hard as it is, if we don’t make this small sacrifice, we may lose the war.” He gulped. “I know it’s hard, but this is where my foreknowledge is extremely important.”

“Why?” His voice was weak, as if he knew he would not like the answer.

“Because I can’t risk you going after him early as there is an event we must let happen. If you try to capture Pettigrew and fail, Sirius will be stuck in prison and we may not be able to remove all of the anchors before Voldemort gets a real body back. Remember that I told you that Voldemort tried to make an anchor and accidentally succeeded?” He nodded. “A piece of his soul went into you, Harry, into your scar. That’s why you had so much pain there when you were fighting Quirrell in your first year.” She remembered the memory her Harry had showed her of that fight.

He reached up and gingerly touched his scar. “I have a part of him? In me?” He looked scared and Ginny could not blame him.

"Yeah, but it will not hurt you unless you are near him again, and that won't happen; we'll see to that." He nodded and she was grateful that he believed her. "You see, something will happen this summer, and will cause Sirius to escape from prison. Because he escapes, the Minister puts creatures called Dementors around the school to supposedly protect us from Sirius. We need you to come in contact with a Dementor so it can suck the soul part of Voldemort out of you."

Harry turned a little green. "I don't know what that entails, but it doesn't sound good."

She gave him a grim smile. "Well put, but I shall be there to protect you. You just have to get your forehead to its mouth, and it will do the right thing. After that, I will cast a spell to destroy the Dementor to ensure that soul fragment is destroyed." She paused and gave him a grin. "The amusing part to me is that it was your future self that developed the spell that destroys Dementors; so you're really helping yourself here."

He laughed weakly. "Right. So what happens to make Sirius escape now and why not right after he went to prison?"

"Sirius said that the reason he escaped is because Minister Fudge gave him a copy of the Daily Prophet and a picture in it motivated him to escape," she calmly explained. "I need to make sure that picture gets in the newspaper again, but that shouldn't be too hard."

Harry looked confused. "But Ginny, Fudge isn't Minister anymore, Bones is."

Ginny suddenly felt horror as she realized what had been nagging her at the back of her mind. "Holy bloody hell!" she swore as she smacked the sides of her head with both hands. "I've really messed this up."

"So it's not going the way you planned?" Harry asked timidly.

She counted to five slowly before she answered. There was no need to take out the anger she felt towards herself on Harry. "No. I have

royally bungled it. I forgot I needed Fudge in office to do stupid things at this point in time. I sent the letters to Bones too soon. Damn!"

There was silence for a few seconds. "You're the one that told Bones about the Death Eaters, aren't you?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Ginny admitted. "The Director exceeded my expectations by getting rid of so many corrupt people at once, but it's all still my fault. Worse still, if I had recognized my mistake sooner, we could have gotten Sirius released six months ago." She banged her head on the palm of her hand. She started to do it again, but felt Harry pull her hand away so she missed. Looking up to glare at him to interrupting her self-torture, she stopped when she saw the compassionate look on his face.

"You told Dumbledore that no one is perfect and that everyone makes mistakes. That includes you too, Ginny. I wished your plan had worked or that Sirius had been let out sooner, but at least you had a plan and you were trying your best to help me." He looked down for a moment before he softly said, "I can't say that about anyone else."

She could not stop herself and moved over to him as she said, "Oh, Harry." Ginny wrapped him in a hug and held him tightly for a moment. "There's always a plan B, we'll just have to find it." Letting him go, she moved back just slightly so she could think better, not being influenced by her joy of holding him.

"How did you destroy it, you know, the thing in me, the last time?"

"Hermione found an exorcism ritual that did it. The problem there is that it took a half a dozen people searching full-time for the ingredients nearly a year to find them, and it was very expensive. In fact, it was more expensive than everything you have in your trust vault at the moment. To top it off, it took four of us to do the ritual on you and I don't want to tell that many others about all of this. So I needed to find another way, and I thought the Dementor idea would work." Ginny sighed and mentally cursed her stupidity again.

"You said there were other things, Horcruxes. How did you destroy them and can you do that to me too?"

A smile came over Ginny. Harry never gave up and that was one of things she liked about him. "One of them got destroyed with fire. That's how I've destroyed the others in this timeline, but that would have fatal consequences for you."

Harry gulped and she chuckled.

"The Sword of Gryffindor was also used. The magic in the sword seemed to be up to the task. Hmm..."

"Maybe you could just poke the end of it into my scar?" Harry asked.

She nodded. "That's what I was wondering. That might be the safest. On the other hand, getting the sword will not be easy as it's presently hiding in the Sorting Hat in the Headmaster's office, AND I think it requires great need to get it out."

"I have a great need," Harry said seriously.

"I meant great need in the form of save your life while battling evil or die trying," she told him with a smirk.

Harry gulped again.

"Still, it is an idea and if we can talk to the Hat we can find out if it will help us. If not, then we really haven't lost much. The hardest part will be getting access to the hat." Ginny contemplated that.

"During a meal would be easiest time," Harry volunteered.

"True," she agreed, "but if he has alarms on his office, and I'm sure he does, he would immediately come. It would be best to do when he's not in the castle."

"What about over the summer?"

Ginny considered that seriously, because it did have real merit. She finally shook her head. "I like it, but I don't know how to tell if he's there or not, as he lives in the castle year around. We'd have to know

he was away doing Mugwump things or something. I know how to get into the school, but his door will probably be locked too." She sighed yet again. "I think that will have to be plan C."

"OK, how else did you destroy them?"

"You destroyed one using a basilisk fang, or more accurately the venom in the fang. That might be possible," she mused, trying to think it through.

"We can get that, but wouldn't that kill me?" Harry asked with big eyes, as if afraid of the answer.

Ginny mentally went back on forth on whether to tell him or not. Her mischievous side finally won. "In your second year at Hogwarts, in the other timeline," she quickly added, "you killed the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets with the Sword of Gryffindor and a little help from Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix."

"No bloody way!" Harry was incredulous, even his body posture seemed to rebel.

"Your older self showed me the Pensieve memory and I'll say it was incredible," she said wistfully.

"But why would I do something like that?"

"Because the diary that Lucius Malfoy gave me was a Horcrux and allowed a sixteen year-old version of Voldemort to possess me. At the end of the year, it took me to the Chamber to kill me and you found out and rescued me, fighting the basilisk and killing it."

Harry looked amazed, but he did not say anything.

"As you killed the basilisk, it bit you. Fortunately, Fawkes was still there and healed you. Then just before I would have died, you took the fang that bit you and stabbed the diary that was Voldemort, killing him." Ginny looked at him with profound gratitude. "You saved my life that day." And you were my knight in shining armor, she added to herself.

Harry blushed for a moment. "So if we had a fang, we could stab my scar with it and then use phoenix tears to heal me."

Ginny thought about that. It sounded so simple and easy, but would it work? She hoped it did, but if not, she might have to involve Dumbledore and she desperately did not want to do that. "We'll have to break into the Chamber of Secrets where the unsold parts are stored to get a fang. I'm reasonably sure there are some left. As for the tears of a phoenix, those will be hard. I'd love to have Fawkes help us, but again, it would probably involve telling Dumbledore to get his cooperation."

"I agree, I'd prefer to do this without Dumbledore," Harry said. "Can you buy them? I do have money."

"Yes, but they're rare and will be expensive. Still, it is guaranteed to get some that way and we both have money." She smiled and looked at him. "I think that is the new plan B."

Harry smiled. "Yes! We're back on track. What else?"

"Well, now that we don't have to wait, there's no reason not to get Sirius out of prison either tomorrow or the next day."

"How do we do that?" Harry asked eagerly.

Ginny thought about that. She was going to unmask the man, so to speak, at school in front of a lot of witnesses to make sure he did not disappear. But with Bones in office and Shacklebolt as the head of the MLE, she did not really have that worry anymore. She looked at Harry. "In your picture album, is there a picture of Peter Pettigrew?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because that's who betrayed your parents. So when I force him out of hiding, you're going to need to make a noise about that man being Peter Pettigrew when the Aurors are here to arrest him for breaking into our house. The story of your parents' death is famous enough

they will know who he is and that will start the process of freeing your godfather.”

Harry was smiling and happy. “I’m looking forward to it. Then what?”

“Then, after Sirius is out of prison, we’ll need to talk to him alone and take him into our confidence. He is the only other person I’ve planned to tell my secret to, as we’ll need his help getting the last two Horcruxes. Once we have those, I’ll help you to destroy them and then Voldemort should be gone for good.”

Harry sat there for a long moment thinking. Ginny joined him in considering a war-free world. It was a wonderful thought.

“Do you think he’ll want to know me?” Harry finally asked, breaking the silence. “I mean, he’s been in prison. Maybe he’s forgotten about me.”

Ginny was not surprised he was thinking about his godfather and almost laughed, but held it in. “Oh Harry, if you only knew how much Sirius wants to be with you. Don’t worry, just hang on and you can find out for yourself. In the other timeline, Sirius enjoyed every minute he got to spend with you.”

“Really?” Harry looked like he did not believe her, even though his body language said that he wanted to believe her.

She nodded quickly. “Really and truly.” He accepted that and leaned back with a goofy smile on his face. This Harry and her Harry were very much alike on the subject of Sirius.

“So you see, Harry,” she continued her explanation, “once you destroy the last of the Horcruxes, then Voldemort will have nothing holding him to this earth any longer. In theory, he should just leave on his own, assuming he’s floating around. It’s possible that he’s possessing some animal, trying to stay alive. If that’s true, then when the animal dies, he should leave this earth then. The great thing, is that you’ll never have to fight him one on one.” She smiled at her logic and it was contagious, as he broadly smiled back.

“Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!”

“Thanks!” she beamed at him, enjoying his praise. “Of course, there are all kinds of things that can go wrong, and we’ll have to make adjustments for, but I think we can do this.”

“That will be so great,” he said with a yawn.

“Yes it will.” She looked at her watch and saw that it was after one. “Unless you have any more questions, I think we should call it a night.”

“Yeah, probably so. It will be a long day tomorrow now,” he told her.

“Use the potion I gave you, a couple of sips at a time, but go to the bathroom to take it. It usually causes smoke to come out of your ears, so you need to be somewhere private for a few minutes,” she instructed him.

“Right, thanks. And thanks for telling me the rest, Ginny. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your help,” he told her sincerely.

She smirked as a tease presented itself. “You don’t have to tell me, Harry, just show me.”

“Huh?”

“Stand up,” she commanded him as she stood. Shrugging, he stood. Ginny wrapped her arms around him in a hug. “Show me,” she whispered intimately into his ear. As she felt his arms go around her, that warm and safe feeling came over her -- again. “Anytime you feel appreciative, feel free to show me.” Ginny reluctantly let go. As she felt him let go, she stepped back, sure she was blushing at least a little. While he was blushing too, to her surprise, he was also grinning.

“There is one other small thing you can do for me,” she told him with an impish grin, “but we’ll discuss that some other time, like next summer.”

He looked puzzled. “Next summer? Why then?”

Ginny sighed. He was such a boy still. "I think that would work better, but," her impish grin came back, "if you figure it out on your own before then, that's fine with me. Good-night, Harry." She winked at him before she turned around and removed her spells and left. She was not sure if he would figure it out or not, or if he did, what he would do.

The thought of snogging Harry filled her thoughts as she stepped into her room and closed the door. As she turned around to get her pyjamas, she suddenly saw a person in the chair at her desk, illuminated in the pale moonlight. Gasping at the surprise, she recognized her father. "Dad?" she weakly queried.

He pulled out his wand and whispered a silencing spell towards the door, lit the candle by her bed, then he put the wand away. "Ginny, have a seat," he said in a very controlled tone of voice as he pointed to the bed; she meekly complied. "I'm very curious about something and I'm sure you can help me by answering a few questions."

Dread filled her as she sat. How long had he been sitting there?

"While not as often as I'd like, I do check on my children from time to time, making sure everything is all right. There's something about seeing them sleep that is soothing to me; perhaps it's the nostalgic moments from when they were babies."

His casualness and quiet voice made the situation worse for her.

"Therefore, I'm sure you can understand that when I find one of my children not in their bed late at night, that I become concerned. Usually, this happens with the twins." He shrugged as if it was a matter of no importance, or else easily dealt with. "But when I find my daughter missing for over half an hour, and the only room I can't easily check is the bedroom of a boy who is our guest, and said bedroom has silencing spells on it, I'm sure you can understand how I might be concerned about that, and I might be inclined to jump to conclusions that are not good for anyone. So, Ginevra..."

Oh Merlin, she thought, I am in deep shit now.

"I'd like to know exactly why this situation has come up, and I'd like the complete truth."

His voice was still calm after all of that, and she was practically shaking, despite her mental age. "Well, Dad, I, uh, I do have a good reason -- really."

"The truth, Ginny." His look said nothing less would be acceptable. Her easy-going father was nowhere to be found.

She nodded and left her head bowed, not wanting to see disappointment on his face. "I needed to talk with Harry, well, we both needed someone to talk to, but probably him more than me. And you see, we had to do it now as that was the only time we could." She was not sure that made sense, but she really needed to keep the details to herself.

"So you thought that the middle of the night would be a good time to talk?" He sounded like he did not believe her.

"Well, the only time really," she told him. "We can't talk during the day because there's no privacy. Even during the day when you're at work, there's five other people in the house, and they're always around us. Or if we go outside, someone always seems to come find us a few minutes later to go flying, play chess, do chores, or just hang around. And if we were to try to send them away, they would tease us about it." She looked up at him. "So this is the only time we can talk about serious things."

"And what would be so serious that you would need privacy to discuss?"

Ginny knew she had to say something; refusal would only make things worse. "Mostly about his relatives, but about his family too. I also explain things about the Wizarding world because he doesn't understand why some things happen, and well, it would be embarrassing for him to talk about a lot of this stuff in front of Ron. And the twins, they would probably make fun of him."

“But he can talk about all of that with you?” She nodded. “The girl who loved the Harry Potter story and had a crush on him since she was five?”

She could not help the blush she could feel. “Dad! I’m only twelve and he’s only thirteen. Nothing like that is happening.”

“Like what, Ginny?”

Her eyes snapped to his face, searching. He was either totally serious or hiding the tease really well. “Nothing, Dad, you have nothing to be concerned about. Harry and I are just friends, nothing more.”

He sat there and looked at her for a moment. “I do understand your problem, Ginny. I’ve always liked having a large family, but I do recognize that privacy can be hard to come by here. Still, I do not believe you made a good decision. What do you think your mother’s reaction would be if she had been the one to find you?”

Ginny lost her blush quickly and then some, going white. That was a disturbing thought. The entire house would know about this, even if it was the middle of the night.

“I see by your expression that you have a good idea what would happen.” He paused for a moment. “I think I need you to make a promise, Ginny.”

“What?” There were several things he could ask her for, and she wondered which it would be.

He leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees, looking at her even more seriously, which she thought would not have been possible. “I want you to promise me that in this house, you will not be with Harry behind a closed door, regardless of the time.”

Ginny was not happy about that, but he could have sent Harry away.

“If you need to have a private conversation, try asking your mother to spell off part of the living room, or go outside and sit on the garden

bench where no one can hide near you. As for your brothers, I'll handle their teasing. While your mother and I think of Harry as an honorary Weasley, we know that he is not really one, and therefore, he might have secrets that are not our secrets, and he might choose to share with someone for a second opinion. Will that do?"

She nodded. "I promise, no closed doors for us in the house." Then she grinned and added, "Unless we're married someday."

Her father just looked at her for a moment, his serious expression intact, until it slowly faded into a wry grin. "Should you manage to capture his heart and his wedding ring, my daughter, then I will release you from this promise. But until then..."

"Until then," Ginny softly echoed him.

"You're a good girl at heart, Ginny. I do believe Harry needs all the true friends he can get." He got up and walked over and planted a light kiss on her forehead. "Good-night, Ginny."

"Good-night, Dad. Oh wait!" She suddenly remembered she had something for him. Digging in her book bag from school, she pulled out a bank draft and handed it to him. "I forgot that Professor Dumbledore gave this to me just before I left school. I should have given it to you a few days ago, I'm sorry."

He smiled. "No real harm done, since this is extra to us. Hmm, another fifty-one hundred Galleons. Thank you, Ginny. You're a real Weasley, thinking of our family like this." He took his spell down and told her good-night again.

Alone in her room, Ginny changed and crawled into bed a littler after half one in the morning, very relieved that a crisis had been averted. Pushing that thought away, she turned to her favorite thoughts to go to bed with: Harry. She was soon fast asleep with a smile on her face.

The next morning, Ginny was bleary-eyed as she came down to breakfast. A weary-looking Harry was already there sitting at the table and barely eating. While she did not want to, Ginny decided she was going to have to take at least a little of her potion. She looked at

Harry and mimed drinking. He got the idea and nodded. They finished breakfast about the same time and both went upstairs.

Ginny drank one of her potions and felt a lot better as the energy spread through her body. Looking into the mirror, she saw the last of the smoke come out of her ears. Feeling much more normal, she started to leave her room and go back downstairs when Ron passed her going down to eat his breakfast. That gave her an idea.

She went to Harry's room and softly knocked on the door; he opened it. "I think now's a good time to 'find' someone." He nodded and followed her as she left for the stairs. They both went up to Ron's room.

"Why are we here? I thought you'd have to go out and find him," he whispered.

Ginny pulled her wand and shot a Stunning spell at Ron's rat.

"What are you doing?"

She dumped the rat onto the floor and shot a spell at it. The rat turned into a man.

"Wh--"

Ginny clamped a hand over his mouth. "Not yet," she whispered. "And sorry, I should have warned you."

"That's Pettigrew."

"I know."

"And he's been here... I've slept with him in my dorm room."

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't tell you, Harry. You can yell at me later. Now, I'm going to stand him up and I want you to hit him. I'll let him fall against the wall. When we're asked, we can say that we heard a noise, came up here and found him when you hit him and he knocked

himself out when he hit his head. The Aurors will get called and then you can say his name and ask how he's alive. All right?"

He still looked a little upset and now nervous, but he nodded.

Ginny waved her wand and Pettigrew rose up to an approximation of standing, despite the fact that he was slumped over. "OK, I'm going to scream like a little girl while you hit him." He grinned at that. "Feel free to yell like you would if you were surprised. Do your best acting, Harry."

Harry briskly nodded and pulled his arm back. As he let the punch go, Ginny screamed, twice and cast a compulsion to tell the truth on him before she put her wand away. Thunderous footsteps could be heard on the stairs by the time Pettigrew lay motionless on the floor.

Percy was the first there, wand in hand.

Ginny ran to him and threw her arms around him. "There's a strange man up here."

Percy looked at the man that was under Harry murderous looking glare with disbelief. "How?"

"I don't know. We heard a noise and came to look. Harry hit him to save me." That might have been slightly overboard, but Ginny thought making Harry look like her savior would have benefits -- for her.

More people came up to the top floor: the twins first, then Ron, and finally her mother. They all gaped at the strange man.

"Who is he and what's he doing here?" the mother finally asked, pulling her wand out of her apron.

"That's Peter Pettigrew; I recognize him from the pictures in my family album," Harry said venomously. "Since he's not dead, he must have been the one to have betrayed my family." He then viciously kicked the man in the ribs.

Ginny thought that was a bit over the top too, but perhaps not for Harry after she thought about it.

“Percy, go downstairs and contact your father at the Ministry. Tell him he needs to come home and bring some Aurors with him.” She took Ginny from her brother. Ginny wrapped her arms around her mother’s waist.

They all stood there for next few minutes and just looked at the man. He was like an accident: you just could not look away even if you wanted to.

Voices eventually came up the stairs, along with hurried footsteps. Her father led the two Aurors and her brother.

“Where did he come from?” her father asked.

When no one said anything, Ginny said in a quiet voice, “Ron’s rat is missing and they told us in school that some people can become animals...” Both Ron and Percy looked slightly ill at that statement.

One of the Aurors pulled out some manacles and put them on the man. “I don’t who this is, but we’ll get to the bottom of it.”

“It’s Peter Pettigrew; I recognize him from the pictures in my family album,” Harry said. “He’s not really dead, so maybe my godfather is really innocent.”

That caused a stir and all the adults started talking. Ginny got an idea and leaned over to whisper in Harry’s ear. He gave her a questioning look, but when she nodded at him, he nodded back.

As the chaos finally died down, the Aurors searched Pettigrew and pulled out two wands.

“Hey, one of those looks like my wand,” Harry exclaimed and pointed.

The Auror holding the wand looked at him. “You sure, lad?”

“Can I hold it and wave it to make sure?”

The two Aurors looked at each other. The second shrugged, so the one with the wand handed it to Harry. Harry waved it and a fountain of maroon and gold sparks came out of it.

"It feels like my wand, but it's not," Harry said.

"If that wand isn't his, it's the most compatible wand I've ever seen," the Auror said. "What's your name?"

"Harry, Harry Potter."

"THE Harry Potter?"

"Yes, sir. It's not my wand, but can you make the wand reveal what it last did?"

The Auror looked at the other and they seemed to have a short but silent conversation. "It won't hurt," one said and pulled his wand out. Doing a *Priori Incantatum*, everyone but Ginny was shocked to see the image of a Killing Curse and a red-haired woman come out of the wand.

"My mother..." Harry whispered in the silence.

"That's You-Know-Who's wand!" the Auror said. The other Auror pulled up the left sleeve of Pettigrew and everyone saw a faded looking Dark Mark. "I bet that gets his Order of Merlin taken away." The other Auror nodded.

The Auror looked at a Harry. "We'll also need a statement from you since you found him."

"Ginny was with me when we walked into the room."

"Right. We'll need a statement from you too, miss."

"Perhaps you could take Pettigrew in and then come back for the statements?" Mr Weasley suggested.

“Certainly,” the second Auror said. “There is no need to have him here. We’ll be back in a few minutes, maybe even with the Director.”

“We’ll all go down and wait in the living room.” Mr Weasley let the Aurors take Pettigrew down and then herded his family down into the living room.

Ginny was pleased that no one seriously questioned their story, not even Director Shacklebolt, who came to hear the statements. Apparently, Pettigrew had awakened when they put him into his cell and when asked, he confirmed that he was a rat Animagus. He also confessed to being a Death Eater and the one to kill all the Muggles when he was fighting Sirius.

Sirius was sure to be released. The only question now was how he would react when she told him her story.

((A/N: Yes, the average Auror is basically a sheep, a smarter sheep, but still easily led when handed certain “observations” by “known trustworthy people”.))

I've finally addressed what some of you have been asking about in the reviews: Didn't Ginny changes create problems, especially in getting rid of Fudge so early? As I've pointed out in this chapter, the answer is yes. Ginny is smart and her foreknowledge is extremely useful, but that foreknowledge becomes less useful as more changes are made, and Ginny is no Hermione when it comes to planning. Still, her main goal is closer than ever before.

The observant will notice that Ginny left 1 very important detail out of her conversation with Harry. The usual question applies: Will that come back to bite her?))

Chapter 11 - Serious Business

The morning after Scabbers, a.k.a. Peter Pettigrew, was forcibly taken from the Weasley home, three owls flew to The Burrow while all the children in the house were having breakfast. One flew to Harry, another to Ron, and the last came to Ginny. The envelope had the seal of Hogwarts on it.

"What's this?" Ron asked as he looked at it, as if afraid that the envelope might be dangerous. "We got our exam results before we left school."

"That would be your letter explaining about the extra classes and a form for you to complete indicating the ones you desire to take for the next three years," Percy told them. "You must choose carefully as they will ultimately affect which careers you can choose. I would be happy to advise you."

Ron rolled his eyes and Ginny almost giggled at their slightly stuffy brother. However, Harry looked interested and started tearing his envelope open. He pulled out three sheets and started reading. The other two opened their envelopes too. Ginny looked at her twin brothers and saw that they were in their own little world as they whispered to each other; that was probably for the best.

"You'll also find your Hogsmeade permission forms in there," Percy added as an afterthought.

"Percy, what is Arithmancy?" Harry asked.

"Harry, you don't want to take that; take Divination instead. It will be a lot easier," Ron told him. "I'm going to sign up for that."

"That would be a waste of your time, Ron, as you have not shown any Divination abilities yet," Percy told him. "Or have you had experiences of which you have not informed us?"

"Me? Of course not, but I figure you can just make stuff up. How's the teacher to know if you had a vision or not?" Ron said with a grin.

“Utterly irresponsible,” Percy intoned. “Harry, to answer your question, Arithmancy is a maths-based discipline with several applications. In the beginning, you will learn numerology, which is similar to Divination but with numbers. If you pursue the subject into the NEWT level, you will start to learn the basis of spell crafting, as spells do have a basis in maths as well, at least if want to explain them. Generally, if you take Arithmancy, you’ll also want to take Ancient Runes, where you learn the writings of ancient languages. In the NEWT level of Ancient Runes, you’ll also learn the rune form of spells which are fundamental to spell crafting and warding, which goes hand in hand with Arithmancy.”

“That sounds interesting,” Harry remarked. He looked at the form. “I don’t need Muggle Studies, since I grew up in that world. What’s Care of Magical Creatures like?”

Percy smiled, probably in finding a willing and attentive listener, Ginny thought.

“In that class, you’ll study various creatures that are only known in the Wizarding world. You’ll learn about magical properties of the creatures, how to recognize them, and how to work with them. It can be a dangerous class too, especially at the NEWT level. Charlie could give you more information, as I have not taken the class.”

Harry nodded. “Thanks, Percy.”

“You’re most welcome, Harry,” Percy slowly nodded back. “If you’ll excuse me, I have other things to do.”

The twins were startled and brought out of their conversation when Percy got up. They got up and left for their room too.

Harry looked at the form again. “It says we are to take at least two, but no more than three.” He looked at Ron. “What are you taking?”

“Divination and Care of Magical Creatures. You’re going to take the same ones, right?” When Harry did not immediately answer, Ron started to beg. “Come on, Harry, you’ve got to join me, mate.”

Harry still did not answer. Instead, he turned to her. "What are you going to take, Ginny?"

She was happy that he was asking her, as well as happy that he was taking this more seriously than Ron. "I plan to take Ancient Runes and Arithmancy. I'm considering the Magical Creatures course, but I'm not sure yet. If you want to take it, I'll take it too. If you don't, I probably won't." She had taken all three courses in the old timeline. They would not be hard for her.

Harry looked thoughtful for a minute. "I think I'll take Care of Magical Creatures, Ancient Runes, and Arithmancy. Sorry Ron, but if you want to take Divination, you're on your own. I know I'm not a Seer."

"Harry, you can't do this to me. Come on, take the easier class; drop Arithmancy," Ron argued, reaching out to him.

"Sorry, Ron. I'm not doing it. I've heard stories about the Divination teacher and I don't want to take a class from her. Why don't you take Arithmancy instead of Divination?"

"What? And have to do a lot of maths? I don't think so."

Harry shrugged. "As you wish. Ginny? Do you have a quill and some ink? I can mark this and we can all send ours back together."

"Sure, Harry." She got up to get something to write with. Her mother always kept a few downstairs.

"Harry..." Ron started to try to make him change his mind and Ginny tuned him out. She knew Harry and it was not going to work.

As she found a quill and some ink, she wondered if Hermione would try to take all five electives again. She started to devise a plan to make sure her friend did not have access to a time-turner, as classes was a stupid reason for such a powerful device, but then Hermione's words came back to her. "You must resist playing God." Was she really doing that here or protecting her friend? Then Flitwick's words came back to her: "Allow Mr Potter to make mistakes." Did she need to let Hermione do this, even if it was a mistake? She thought back to

the other timeline. Was taking all of these classes and getting stressed important for Hermione's development? Damn it! Foreknowledge was supposed to make things easier, not harder!

Ginny grabbed the quill and ink and returned to the dining room.

Harry was glaring at her brother. "I said, shut up! I've made up my mind and I'm not taking Divination. If you want to, fine, go ahead, but I'm not."

That rocked Ginny's world. She did not recall Harry ever acting like that to Ron, at least not until fourth year. On the other hand, her prediction of Harry not being swayed was correct.

Ron got up and glared back before he stomped from the room.

Harry looked and sounded upset. "What's his problem? It's just a class."

Ginny sat back down and handed the writing materials to Harry. "I don't know, but I'd guess he feels like he's being abandoned in some way." He handed the quill to her after he marked his three choices. She marked the same three on her form and signed it. "Don't worry about it, he'll come around eventually."

Harry sat there and fumed.

"How about we go flying? You know, just enjoying the breeze through our hair. No balls to be thrown or chased, just fly for the fun of it?" It was one of his favorite things to do, so she hoped he took the suggestion and calmed down.

After a long moment, he quietly said, "Sure. If you'll give me your form I'll give it to Hedwig. Ron can send his form in later."

Ginny smiled and handed hers over. A few minutes later, Harry's owl was flying away and they were flying up into the sky on their brooms. Half an hour later after bumping into the other, chasing each other, some teasing, as well as some outright flirting on Ginny's part, each of them was in a good mood.

By dinner time, Ron was back to normal as if nothing had happened. He did not say what classes he had decided to take, and no one asked. Ginny was almost certain she would never fully understand Ron.

Her father had his own small surprise. After their late dinner, he pulled Harry aside and took him for a walk around the back garden. Ginny stood at the window, watching and wondering. It was a very serious conversation based on the few facial expressions she could see. Ten minutes later, they came back in and her father left to go upstairs.

“Harry?”

He walked over.

“Is everything OK?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Fine I guess.” He looked down for a moment. “Your father said that Sirius Black, my godfather, is free now. It will be in the newspaper tomorrow.”

“That’s great, Harry.” She reached up and put one hand on his shoulder and squeezed. He became a little bashful for a moment.

“Your father,” Harry hesitated for a few seconds. “He also said Sirius wants to meet me and asked if I wanted to meet him.”

“And?” Ginny prompted when he did not go on.

“I told him I thought I would...”

“That’s great, Harry. I’m sure it will be wonderful having someone like that in your life.” She wanted to say more, but refrained in case others overheard.

A grin came over him. "Yeah, yeah I think it will. Can you imagine? I'll have someone who really cares for me to watch over me."

That tore at Ginny and she threw herself forward and gave him a hug. "He's not the only one, Harry," she whispered, "but I think it will be wonderful for you to have Sirius in your life." Harry hugged her back and she enjoyed the moment, until a throat cleared behind her and she felt Harry freeze for a second and then jerk his hands back to himself. She slowly let go and turned. She was not surprised or upset with Harry, it was a natural reaction on his part at his age.

"Mum, did you hear? Harry is going to have a godfather again. Isn't that great?"

Her mother's suspicious look softened and turned to happiness. "Really? Oh, Harry, I'm so happy for you." She rushed forward and gave Harry a hug too. Harry returned her hug and the happy look returned to his face. A happy Harry was always a great way to distract her mother. She almost giggled at the thought.

Much to Harry's disappointment, it was nearly a week before he got to meet Sirius, due to the man's need to physically recover from his ordeal in prison. He and Ginny had had a few private conversations out in the back garden, in which Ginny told him some more stories about his family, including some with Sirius in them. She also explained about the Marauders in detail, which led to stories about Remus Lupin as well. She hoped Lupin would be their Defense teacher for the year as he had been quite good in the other timeline.

She also had a difficult decision to make: What to do about the Marauder's Map? The twins had given it to Harry in his third year, which he was about to start. She could just take it from the twins, but that would eventually come out and how would she explain how she knew about it? Similarly, if she went and asked them for it to give to Harry, again, how would she explain her knowledge of the map? She pondered that question as she helped her mother with the setup for Harry's thirteenth birthday party, a party that would also be the time for Harry to meet his godfather. Could she use this to her -- and Harry's -- advantage?

There was a knock on the door and everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at it, as they all knew that a visitor was expected. Ginny's father got up and went to the back door to answer it.

"Hello, Arthur," came a man's voice through the screen door.

"Sirius," her father jovially returned. "Do come in. We have a young man here who has been dying to meet you."

In walked a thirty-something man in very well tailored robes and dark brown hair pulled back in a short pony-tail. He was reasonably nice looking, Ginny thought. Or at least nice-looking if you liked middle-aged men. Her favorite man had at least twenty years before he became that old, she thought with a mental giggle. Sirius looked a lot healthier than he had in his wanted poster. She watched the man smile as Harry walked up to him.

"I'm Harry." He held out his hand.

Sirius shook his hand. "I'm Sirius Black." He slowly pulled Harry to him and opened his arms. Harry stepped into the hug with a smile on his face. When they parted, Sirius put a hand on Harry's shoulder and adopted a very solemn look. "Harry, I'm so happy to be here with you, but I believe I owe you a rather large apology. Nearly twelve years ago, I let my emotions get the better of me and went chasing a traitor, a traitor that you caught. Because of that, I was not there for you when you needed me most. I'm so sorry, Harry, and I promise you that I will never ever let that happen again. I was young and foolish, but that doesn't excuse me for breaking my promise to your parents to watch over you if you had no one else. I hope you'll forgive me and still love me anyway."

Ginny saw tears come to Harry's eyes and it was all she could do not to cry herself. She would have looked away to try and gather her emotions, but she was riveted by the scene in front of her.

"Of course," was all Harry said before he threw himself at Sirius, wrapping his arms around the man's waist.

"Thank you, Harry, thank you," Sirius hoarsely said, his voice filled with emotion as he patted the young man on the back.

When they finally separated, Sirius asked, "Harry, would you introduce me? While I've met Arthur before and gotten to know him better this week, I don't believe I know anyone else."

"Oh, sure." Harry looked around. "These are the Weasleys, or at least most of them. Bill and Charlie are not here. Bill's in Egypt and Charlie is in Romania. This is Mrs Weasley." He held out his hand towards her.

"Molly," Sirius intoned and stepped forward, "Arthur has spoken highly of you." When she held out her hand, he gently grabbed it and kissed the back of it, making her blush. "I'm sorry we've never met before, but family reunions were never something I enjoyed attending when I was younger."

"Sirius. I met great-aunt Walburga once and I understand. I'm glad you're here for Harry, not that we haven't enjoyed every moment of his company, but every boy needs someone to look after him."

"Truer words were never spoken," he said with a grin and a glance at Harry as he released her hand. "Thank you for helping, Molly." He looked at Harry fondly.

"This is Percy." Harry indicated the oldest Weasley brother present.

"Percival Weasley at your service."

Sirius shook the young man's hand with a grin and a nod. "Percival."

"These two are Fred and George, or maybe George and Fred, or as they like to be called," Harry grinned madly, "Gred and Forge."

Sirius chuckled. "Men after my own heart, it sounds like." He shook both of their hands.

"This is one of my best friends, Ron."

“Ron, I appreciate you helping Harry out. A friend is great, a best friend is golden.” Ron blushed as Sirius shook his hand.

“And this,” Harry place his hand on her shoulder as she was standing next to him, “is one of my other best friends, Ginny, or maybe Ginevra, depending on how she feels.” He said teasingly.

Sirius raised an eyebrow and grinned before he held out his hand.

Ginny gave Harry a quick glare before she held out her hand and watched Sirius take it and kiss the back of her hand as he had done to her mother. She blushed furiously. Ginny did not remember the other Sirius being like this. Sure, he had been charming a few times, but never like this. She suddenly realized this was the Sirius Black of Hogwarts and a Pureblood scion, something the fugitive Sirius had never been allowed to be.

“Miss Weasley, I also appreciate you helping Harry while I have been unable to do so.” His smile grew just slightly as his gaze flicked to Harry for a brief moment. “Perhaps we could talk later to discuss Harry’s social talents and standing. I suspect you would have a very different point of view than your brothers. As his godfather, I would be willing to entertain any, uh, suggestions you might have.”

He was a charmer and a tease! She glanced over to see if Harry was as red as she must be and she saw that his cheeks were flaming red as he examined his shoes.

Swallowing to try and find her voice, she finally said, “I -- I’d be delighted, Mr Black. I’m certain there are several things we should discuss. And please call me Ginny.”

“How delightful, Ginny. I look forward to our conversation.” He looked around with a big smile. “Now that we have been introduced and need not be formal, everyone, please call me Sirius.”

“Well, Sirius, why don’t you come to the dining room,” Molly invited him. “Lunch is ready. Cake and presents will be after that.” Sirius followed everyone and took a seat beside Harry. Ginny sat on the other side of Harry.

As they started eating, Sirius turned to his godson. "Harry, would you tell me how you caught Peter? I've heard several versions of the story, all slightly different. It seems the Aurors like to embellish parts of it. Were I to believe them, I would have to believe you were more amazing than Albus Dumbledore." Then he added mostly under his breath, "Although that might not be too hard for me to believe at the moment."

Harry grinned and told him the same story he had told the Aurors.

Sirius nodded. "That makes much more sense. Peter, or Wormtail as we used to call him," the twins eyes went wide at that, "was very good at hiding, but he was never the fastest broom in the shed. Nevertheless, if he had enough time, he was a good planner."

"Wormtail, you say?" Forge asked.

"Yes, that was his nickname in school," Sirius answered. "To my everlasting regret, we invited him to become a Marauder."

"Do you know who the Marauders were?" Gred asked with reverence.

Sirius let a barking laugh out. "Of course. Why?"

It was all Ginny could do not to laugh as well. She also considered that this might play right into her hands.

"We've wanted to meet them..."

"But we could never find out who they were."

Ginny noticed that everyone was paying rapt attention to their guest, especially Harry.

"Well, you know of one now. He was really the weakest member of our group..." Sirius started before he was interrupted.

"Your group?!"

Sirius laughed again. "Yes. I'm Padfoot."

Wide grins split Fred and George's faces.

He put his hand on Harry's shoulder. "This is the son of Prongs." He looked down at Harry with a sad look. "I owe you a lot of stories, Harry. Your father was my best friend and your mother was very special too, to all of us." He looked back at the twins with his own grin. "And I've heard a rumor that you'll meet the last Marauder this coming year at school."

"Moony?"

"Otherwise known as Remus Lupin. I've been told he's been offered the job as the teacher for Defense Against the Dark Arts. If he takes it, you'll have a very good teacher."

"Did you know," Gred said excitedly as Sirius tried to finish his lunch, "that you have a massive file in Filch's office?"

Sirius almost spit out his food as he started laughing and had to hastily grab his napkin. "Yes." He grinned at them and cast quick looks to their parents, who seemed amused. "Were you in his office for his pleasure or your business?"

The twins also glanced at their parents, who were paying close attention. Ginny had to work hard to hold her laughter in. Ron and Harry appeared to be the same way. Even Percy was smiling at the conversation.

"Well you know how it is," one twin said, looking nervously to the other.

"There are so many good reasons to visit the caretaker." The other twin returned the look and the conversation.

"There's so much...useful information there."

"Exactly. Like the banned list," he started to relax a little.

“Right, my brother. Checking the list to make sure we don’t break the rules should be done often.”

Ginny could not help it; she started to giggle. That started Harry laughing and everyone else soon joined in, even her parents. The twins laughed too, although they were very red.

As everyone calmed down, Ginny took her chance. “Uh, haven’t I heard you say you have something of the Marauders?” she asked innocently.

The twins looked bashfully at one another while Sirius looked thoughtful.

“I’m not sure what would have survived, except for maybe...” Sirius looked at the twins. “Did you perchance find an old parchment with our names on it?” he asked very vaguely.

“Uh, yeah. We found one with your names on it.”

“Very clever.” George looked at Fred, who gave a nod. “We really don’t need it anymore. Would you like it back?”

A slow and very mischievous smile lit Sirius’s face. “I think you should give it to Harry, as he would appreciate something from his father.” The twins readily agreed and Harry looked very interested.

Her mother looked very curious to know what was being talked about, but since Sirius had handled the matter, she ignored it and stood. “It looks as if everyone is done. Fred, George, please clear the dishes. Ginny, please get the small plates and more forks. Everyone else, get the presents. Harry and Sirius, please stay seated.” Everyone did as they were told. Ginny could hardly wait to see Harry’s face when he saw what she had ordered for him. She had had to have it custom made.

A few minutes later, they were singing “Happy Birthday” to Harry and he blew out the candles on his chocolate cake. While her mother cut up the cake, presents were thrust upon him.

Harry got a nice watch from her parents. Fred and George gave him a book for Seekers, as did Ron. Percy gave Harry a book on Celtic Runes. A package was opened from Hermione, who had mailed it. Hermione gave him a book on studying for OWLs. Ginny almost choked on her laughter at that one. Harry then reached for the last present -- hers.

He found an oversized but thin leather book. Inside, he saw the word Potter, in large letters. He gave her a confused look.

"Go ahead, Harry, look at the next few pages," she told him, watching him closely since she was sitting beside him.

Harry flipped the page and saw the Potter coat of arms as well as his family's Tartan. The next page had a large tree of names and dates. He looked at her again, this time with watery eyes. Turning the page again, he saw names, dates, and descriptions.

"It not much, Harry, but that's the best I could find about your family. I had someone put it together from the records at the Ministry. Since it was founded in 1383, there's only information for the last six hundred years," Ginny explained.

He put the book down on the table and turned to her and hugged her tightly. "Thank you, Ginny! This means so much to me. It's the best present I've received." Ginny almost cried she was so happy. Making Harry happy was the best thing in the world. She hated to let him go, but she had to. Harry wiped his eyes with the back of his hands.

As he composed himself, Sirius put a hand on his shoulder. "Harry, I'm sorry, but you'll have to wait a week for your present from me. I don't know if Arthur told you, but it's taken me a week to recover enough strength to come see you like this, and I'm afraid I will have to leave soon today, as I'm not fully recovered. So getting you a present has been rather difficult."

"You don't need to get me anything," Harry told him. "Just having a godfather again is enough of a present."

Sirius pulled him into a hug. "I feel the same about you, Harry, but I still want to get you something as I have twelve years of birthdays and Christmases to make up for. Nevertheless, I can give you a promise now. By the time Christmas comes this year, I will have a house that we can live in, and I would very much like for you to come live with me anytime you're not in school."

"Really?!" Harry was very excited.

"Really." Sirius ruffled his hair. "I'm staying in a room at the Leaky Cauldron for the next month while my family house is being cleaned and remodeled. They start tomorrow but won't be done until after you leave for school. But how about you come visit me, say every Saturday for the rest of the summer. We'll buy you school supplies and anything else you need. We'll also spend time getting to know one another. How does that sound?"

"Great!" Harry was practically jumping for joy.

Ginny was happy for him and a look around table showed her that everyone else was too. However, she now had a concern.

"I hate to leave, Harry," Sirius did look sad, "but I really must get some more rest -- healer's orders."

"I understand." Harry looked sad as well.

"Chin up, Harry. I'll see you in a week and I'll be much stronger by then. We can go shopping for your present and spend most of the day together. I already know what to get you for your birthday present."

"You really don't have to," Harry told him bashfully.

"And I told you that I do. Besides, I know you'll love it," Sirius told him teasingly and stood up, thanking Arthur and Molly for their hospitality.

Ginny quickly leaned over and whispered in Harry's ear. "Offer to walk him to the Apparation point. When you're alone, tell him to search for a heavy gold locket with a snake on it that's probably in a

display case in the dining room. Do not get rid of it and put it somewhere safe. Promise you'll tell him why next time, but it is extremely important that locket is not lost or sold."

Harry nodded. When his godfather looked down at him, he said, "Sirius? Ginny suggested that I walk you to the Apparation point. May I?"

"Of course." He looked back at the family for a moment. "Good-bye, Weasleys!" They all chuckled and waved him off. Ginny watched them walk out the back.

It was almost fifteen minutes before Harry came back alone. He nodded to her before he sat down to play a game of chess with Ron. They were getting closer.

Over the next week, Harry spent a lot of time looking at his book about the Potter family. He read and memorized as much of his family's history as possible, or so it seemed to Ginny. They also talked a little about how to tell Sirius her secret, but Harry had no ideas, not knowing the man. She confessed that this Sirius, while very familiar to her, was different than the other Sirius she knew. That worried Harry a little, but she told him she did not think it would matter in the end.

As the next Saturday rolled around, Ginny's next problem reared its ugly head. Ginny could not get away to go with Harry on his trip. Her mother had shot the idea down completely. Even suggesting their entire family go and be nearby "in case Harry needed them" had been discarded. It appeared that Harry was going to have to explain things to Sirius on his own, and he was not comfortable about that.

There were two other options that she could think of. One, she could sneak away by Apparating to Diagon Alley, but her presence at home might be missed and she would be in big trouble in a way could not easily explain her way out of. Two, Harry could try to get Sirius to ask for her; her mother would probably not deny that. However, she suspected that Sirius would want to spend time with Harry only, at least on the first visit. It was maddening to Ginny how little things could be such big problems.

They finally decided that Harry would have to start the explanation, and then have Sirius call for Ginny when he wanted proof. They could use the cover of Sirius wanting to talk about Harry's social standing, which embarrassed Harry, but it was the best excuse they could think of to give to her mother.

Saturday morning after breakfast, Harry dressed in his best "Dudley hand-me-downs" and used the Floo to get to the Leaky Cauldron. Ginny picked up Harry's rune book and read in the living room, hoping a Floo Call for her would come soon.

An hour and a half after Harry had left there still had been no word. Ginny was getting very worried as she slowly went through the book, learning a rune set she had not seen in the other timeline.

"Hello?"

The voice from the fireplace made Ginny jump. She had not seen the flash of light that preceded a Floo call. Looking at the fireplace, she saw Sirius's head. "Er, hi! Who do you need to talk to, Sirius?"

A slightly mischievous look came over him. "If you could fetch one of your parents, I would appreciate it."

"Certainly." Ginny ran to get her mother. Her father was working at the Ministry, handling some emergency. She got her mother from the kitchen.

"Sirius," her mother greeted the man's head in the fireplace. "Is there a problem?"

"Molly. I do hope it is not an inconvenience, but I was wondering if you could spare Ginny for the afternoon. I've been talking with Harry and apparently the two have some sort of business together, and I was hoping to get more details from your daughter." His face suddenly became more charming looking as his smile grew. "I was also hoping she could tell me a few things about my godson with

which he has been less the forthcoming. If I could watch them together, I might be able to guide Harry a little better.”

Her mother chuckled and Ginny blushed slightly. He was such a tease, Ginny thought.

“I don’t think that will be a problem as long as you are there.” Her mother turned and looked at her. “Why don’t you go get a better blouse on, dear? You should look more presentable if you’re to be out.”

Ginny rolled her eyes as she turned and sprinted for her room. She thought her present blouse was just fine and that her mother merely wanted her out of the room for a moment. As she peeled her shirt off, she glanced at her chest and noticed that changes were starting to happen. Perhaps one of those training bras her mother had recently given her would be in order. Strapping it on, she also considered that maybe this was why her mother had sent her up here. She slipped on a more feminine looking blouse and ran a brush through quickly through her hair before she rushed back downstairs. Her mother was joking with the man about how Ginny was so smart and did so well in school. If she was not about to share her secret with Sirius shortly, she would have felt a lot more nervous about that comment.

Her mother looked at her as she went over to the fireplace. “Ginny. Be sure you mind Sirius and I want you home by six. Harry should probably come with you as well.”

“Yes, Mum.” She looked at the fireplace. “Are you ready for me?”

“If you’ll wait about half a minute to step through, I’ll be waiting for you,” he told them. “Thank you, Molly. I appreciate this.” His head disappeared.

“Ginny,” her mother gently put a few strands of hair in place and then made small adjustments to her blouse to straighten it. “Please be on your best behavior this afternoon. It’s very important.”

That confused her. “Why, Mum? I’m just going to talk a little and spend some time with Harry and his godfather.”

Her mother finished fiddling with her blouse. "This time could be very important to your future."

What was she alluding to, Ginny asked herself, giving a confused expression.

"I suppose what I'm trying to say is that Sirius may be considering you for a match for Harry, and I think that would be a very good match, for both of you, especially since I can tell that you like Harry and I think Harry likes you. While your father and I would never force you to marry anyone, this is an opportunity you shouldn't ignore. So you need to make a good impression on him."

Ginny could not believe what she was hearing. Even in the old timeline, her mother had never done anything like this, but then again, this kind of situation had never happened either. A "free" Sirius was having more of an effect on things than she had ever imagined.

"Sure Mum. I think that would be really great, but I don't think you need to worry. If it's meant to be, it will happen."

"Of course, dear. Now, go and be the good little girl I know you are." Her mother kissed her forehead and guided her to the fireplace.

Ginny threw the Floo powder in and said, "The Leaky Cauldron." The last thing she saw as she left was a smiling yet hopeful look on her mother's face. As she went through the Floo network, all she could think about was her mother must be losing her mind. She came out of the fireplace in the Leaky Cauldron to see a very formal looking, although smiling, Sirius Black. Harry was standing beside him looking very nervous. He gave her a nervous smile when she looked at him.

"Miss Weasley, thank you for coming. Since it is almost lunch time, I thought we could talk over lunch in my room. Would you join us?" Sirius was being very formal for some reason.

She nodded and said, "Of course, and it's still Ginny."

He guided the two to the bar area and retrieved two trays loaded with food and gave one to Harry and one to Ginny, while he grabbed a big bucket with ice and bottles of Butterbeer in it.

They started to go upstairs, with Harry in the lead and Sirius in the rear. "I haven't forgotten, Miss Weasley, but I beg your indulgence for a few minutes. Once it is just the three of us and appearances are not so important, we can be more casual with each other."

Harry stopped at a door and Sirius used his free hand to unlock it and swing it open. They all went in.

"You can put the tray on the table," Sirius said as he closed the door and locked it.

Ginny had barely put the tray down and turned around before she was hit with a spell that had been silently cast. Her body froze and her limbs locked up. Harry had barely managed to put his own tray down and caught her as she started to fall.

"Sirius!" Harry shouted.

The man set the bucket down and pointed his drawn wand at the door and cast several privacy spells.

"Sirius! What the hell are you doing?!" Harry shouted again, sounding angry this time.

Sirius turned back around with a sad expression. "My apologies, Harry and Miss Weasley, but I need to take a few precautions before we get comfortable with each other." He waved his wand again and she felt herself rise and float over to the bed in the room, before she softly was placed on it.

"Sirius..." Harry ground out angrily.

"Harry," Black raised his voice a little. "Please be patient for a moment and I'll explain."

Harry shut up, but it was obvious he was very angry. Ginny was having trouble seeing both of them. It was not hard to guess what was happening and she really did not blame Sirius. The way he had made her carry the tray of food so that both her hands were busy was well done. He would have been a helpful addition in the war.

Sirius pulled a chair over to sit near the bed and directed Harry to do the same. With a wave of his wand, he released her head. "My apologies, Miss Weasley, but Harry has told me a most fantastic story, after swearing me to silence." He looked to his godson. "It's a prank worthy of a Marauder."

"I told you it's not a prank. She can prove it," Harry said heatedly. "The locket should prove it too."

Sirius paused for a moment. "That is a coincidence that's very hard to explain, as it was exactly where she said it was. But it's not hard to tell that it is filled with Dark Magic, which raises a few questions."

"Did Harry tell you what Voldemort has done to keep himself alive?" Ginny asked.

"You mean about splitting his soul? Yes. But can you prove it?"

"Do a Homenum Revelio spell on it. It will come up positive. Also, I'm willing to make a magical oath that I'm telling the truth," Ginny offered.

He stared at her for a moment before he got up and went to a bag on the table. A moment later, he returned holding a necklace chain with a heavy golden locket on it. "Homenum Revelio." The locket glowed for a few seconds. He looked at her and then at Harry, then back again. "This is so fantastic as to be unbelievable." He put the locket on the table and returned to his chair. "Harry, I see Ginny's wand in a small pocket on the side of her jeans. Please pull it out and hand it to her." He released her right hand only.

"What? Me?" He blushed slightly.

With a perfectly straight face, Sirius said, "I could, but I felt it would be more appropriate for you than for me. Besides, I'm suspect you might enjoy touching her wand. I'm sure she'd enjoy touching yours."

Harry went bright red, as did Ginny. That was more of the Sirius she was used to. After a pause, Harry snatched her wand out of the pocket she kept it in and put it in her hand. It was done so fast he looked like he was trying to not get burned by it. Ginny noticed that Sirius was relaxed and his wand was pointing at the floor.

"Miss Weasley, your oath of truthfulness please. Assuming you still have your magic, I shall release you and we can have a conversation. If you feel it safer to refuse, I shall have to leave you here while I contact you parents to get you some help for your delusions."

"Sirius! That was uncalled for!"

He sighed. "Harry..."

"Harry," Ginny interrupted. "Sirius is right to take these precautions. If someone had come to us in the other timeline with a story like mine, we would have doing something similar." We would have given them Veritaserum, she thought. Holding her wand tightly, she said, "I, Ginny Weasley, make this oath and swear on my magic that everything I say in this conversation will be the truth." A white pulse of light came from her wand. "By the way, Sirius, you really need to be a little more paranoid."

"Why?" he asked with a grin.

She let the wand spin ninety degrees in her hand as she thought "Chiroptera Mucosus." Sirius had no chance to dodge or block the spell cast silently from three feet away. Miniature light green bats clawed their way out of his nose and started attacking his face. While he fought those off, she turned her wand again and hit herself with a "Finite Incantatum" to release the body bind. She looked at Harry and saw that he was laughing hard at his godfather.

It took Sirius a couple of minutes to knock them far away enough to dispel them before they could attack again. The other two sat and watched in amusement.

"Bloody hell, woman! What was that?" He sounded angry, but he was also grinning at her. He made it sound like a prank well done.

"That was my famous Bat Bogey hex. It's not lethal, but it's great for a distraction," she told him, returning a grin as she sat on the edge of the bed.

"It is," he agreed as he put his wand up. "Nice job on the soundless cast too. I've never seen any second or third-year who could do that." Then he lost his grin. "So, everything Harry told me about a twenty-one year-old you coming back from the future to save us from Dumbledore's mistakes in the war against Voldemort is the truth?"

"Yes, that's true. Trust me, it was really bad and this was the only thing I could think to do. I've got most of the mission accomplished and with that locket you have, there is only one more Horcrux to find."

Sirius became very pensive. "Harry also said that you said that there is a soul fragment in him too."

She nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"What do you plan to do about that?"

"He didn't tell you?"

Sirius looked at Harry for a moment and then shook his head. "No, he wouldn't."

Ginny sighed and looked at her friend. "Thanks, Harry," she said sarcastically. He looked a little embarrassed but did not say anything.

"We need you to buy some phoenix tears -- at least three and preferably five," she explained.

"What? Do you know how expensive those are?" Sirius was shocked.

She ignored the outburst and continued. "Once we have those, I know where to get a basilisk fang. We'll use that to stab his scar to remove the soul fragment, and once that is done, we'll use the tears to combat the venom and heal him. His scar should mostly go away too."

"I forbid it!" Sirius shouted. "There is no way I'm letting basilisk venom get into Harry. Do you know how, how toxic that is? What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking," Ginny said more firmly, "that I want to cure Harry and give him a more normal life without some idiot Dark Wizard trying to kill him."

"With basilisk venom?" Sirius still sounded incredulous. "For Merlin's sake..."

"And how would you propose to remove a soul fragment from him without killing him?" she asked innocently. Ginny looked at Harry and saw him struggling to hold in a chuckle over his godfather's expression, despite the seriousness of the conversation.

Sirius sputtered for a moment. "... Well you could... What about..." He stopped and threw up his hands. "I don't know, I've only had a few minutes to think about this. There must be another way."

"Fair enough," she agreed. "Feel free to research it, without letting anyone else know what you're researching. We can start a search for phoenix tears this afternoon and I will borrow a basilisk fang tonight. If you find a better way before we're ready to destroy the soul fragment, then we can consider it. Besides, if we destroy the fragment in Harry before the others, it should guarantee his survival."

"Why?" Sirius asked and Harry looked very interested too.

"Because part of the prophecy says 'either must die at the hand of the other'. As long as Voldemort isn't wielding the fang, Harry should survive, even if the fragment is not destroyed and we have to find

some other way to take care of it," she explained.

Sirius stared at her. "You're risking a lot on that phrase being literal. And what if the soul fragment gets loose and kills him? That could be his hand."

Ginny looked from one to the other. "Look, it's the best solution I have, and I really do believe it will work. I'm open to other ideas, though."

"Harry said you had originally planned to use a Dementor. Do you know how crazy that is or what that would do to him?" Sirius asked.

"Yes," she quietly said, "I do." She looked right at Harry and her heart went out to him. "He would feel like he would never be happy again while it was happening, and he would hear the fight over him from when he was a baby. He would remember the evil laugh and the Killing Curse as well as his mother's screams." Harry gulped and she looked at Sirius. "It would be a heavy price, but it would be the easiest thing to do and is bearable. I know it would work if we could get access to a Dementor."

Sirius stared intently at her, as if judging her.

"I'm sure you're thinking that I'm a cold-hearted bitch for even thinking of letting a Dementor get near Harry." She saw Sirius look down, unable to hold her gaze. "Nothing could be further from the truth. I like the idea even less than you do, but the alternatives are worse. Do you want to allow Voldemort to get a new body and make Harry fight him? I'd do almost anything to prevent that as I can tell you the result would probably be a long drawn out war that destroys Wizarding Britain and leaves most of us dead."

Sirius let out a long breath. "I'm sorry for judging you like that. You're right. The alternatives are worse. We can not let the Dark Lord come back." He looked back up at her.

She smiled at him to let him know that he was forgiven. "I really do understand."

“So now what?” Harry asked.

Ginny smiled. “We’re getting close. I think we have lunch and then go see about placing an order for phoenix tears. After that, we can go to Gringotts and Sirius can try to take over Bella’s vault as her head of house. Or at least I hope he can.”

“There’s one in there?” the man asked.

“Yes. Last time, Harry had the help of a rogue goblin to break into the bank. It was not a pretty sight, I’m told.” She went to the table and rewarmed the food and they each started grabbing a plate and loading them up from the dishes of food. “I’m hoping to do this the easy way.”

“Good idea, but it won’t work. As long as Bella is alive, they won’t release control of her vault. To make matters worse, not only does she have to die, but her husband and his brother will need to go as well, and they will have to go before her. If she dies first, they will inherit whatever she has. You need her to be the last so there is no contest for where her possessions go,” Sirius told them.

Ginny nodded as she opened a Butterbeer. “I was afraid of that, but I have a solution. It will take me a few days, but I think I can arrange for the three of them to be moved out of Azkaban and have an accident on the way, with Bella departing last.”

Sirius opened his own drink. “I really don’t want to know how you’re going to do that, do I?”

She shook her head. “No, probably not. I’ll need to make some arrangements. I’m not proud of having to do this, but they deserve what they’re going to get.”

“Many times over,” Sirius quietly said.

She thought back to information Kingsley had once told her and look at Sirius carefully. “Did they move you from Azkaban from to the Ministry very early in the morning?” He nodded. “Good, then my information is probably still true. Still just to play it safe, I’ll need you to invite me and Harry over here Monday afternoon, say right after

lunch and until about eight in the evening. The actual event should happen Tuesday morning and you'll read about it in the Prophet on Wednesday. Once you do, you can return to Gringotts to claim her vault."

They all started eating, each being hungry from the excitement of the last hour.

"Sirius? Can you do a couple more things? They would be very helpful," Ginny told him.

"Probably," he told her before he took a drink and then grinned at her.

"I need you to play Head of the House of Black and visit a couple of cousins..."

"Andromeda would be one, wouldn't she?" he asked.

"Yes. She really wanted to be part of the Black family and never got the chance before she died. I know it would mean a lot to her," Ginny said.

"It was already on my list of things to do," Sirius said with a nod. "Was the other thing with Narcissa or Bellatrix?"

"Narcissa. You probably haven't heard, but when Lucius landed himself in Azkaban last September, all the fines he was required to pay emptied a most of the famed Malfoy vaults," she said with an almost evil grin. Sirius laughed and Harry grinned along with her.

"Well done, Miss Weasley," he congratulated her with gusto.

"Thank you," she gave him a modified curtsy. "So Narcissa would probably be inclined to sell a few things to the right people, and as the head of her birth house, I think you can get her to agree."

"Interesting. What did you have in mind?"

“Most importantly, offer to buy the Malfoy library, except for those books that describe the Malfoy family. The book you’re after is called ‘Wizards and Time’...”

“Which is where you got the information to come back in time, and you want to prevent that from falling into the wrong hands,” Sirius finished for her.

“Correct,” she told him with a big smile. “Please get an inventory and make sure that book is there. We can put it in a vault. While you’re there, also make an offer for a house-elf named Dobby, which used to be Lucius’s personal elf.”

Sirius gave her a questioning look. “Since the Black family elf died, a house-elf would be useful, but why?”

“Because in the other timeline, Dobby’s greatest desire was to be free of the Malfoys who abused him very badly.” Ginny looked sad and determined as she explained this. “Harry freed him in his second year in the other timeline. That did not happen this last year, but in order to get Dobby to help me do something in this timeline, I promised him I’d try to free him. He’s very powerful and extremely loyal. Beyond a few oddities, he’s really a wonderful person to have around.”

Sirius considered that. “If Narcissa is low on cash, getting Dobby should be very easy, as they probably have several house-elves. The library will be harder, but I’ll see what I can do.”

Ginny pushed her plate back and grabbed a biscuit. When Harry grabbed one too, she looked at Sirius. “There is one other thing you really need to do this afternoon, you know?”

“I do. We can take a short trip to Madam Malkin’s and another spot I’ve found that caters more to Muggle-borns.” He looked at his godson. “Chin up, Harry. I know it won’t be fun, but I’ll make it happen as fast as I can. Merlin knows I don’t like to do it either.”

“What?” Harry looked confused.

Sirius grinned. "Harry, your parents would not let you dress that way if they were here, and I will not let you do so either, not as my heir."

"I'm your heir?" Harry asked in an amazed voice, almost breathing it.

"Of course you are," Sirius said jauntily, "and you must dress the part. I'll let you keep one set of those, those things, for working in the greenhouses and such, but otherwise, you must remember that you have an image to maintain."

Harry struggled for a moment. "But, but that's not me..."

"Harry," Ginny got him to look at her now. "This is part of what I've been trying to tell you about the Wizarding World. This is part of why Draco makes fun of you, but cause you don't fit the image you should have."

"Wait, what's Draco doing?" Sirius asked as he sat up attentively.

Ginny looked at Harry to see if he wanted to explain, but Harry waved at her to do it. "Besides being an insulting little berk, he's probably the biggest bully at school, even going so far as to threaten some of the younger girls, whom I've had to rescue. I've managed to slap him down a few times and I've threatened him with dire consequences if he gets out of line, but that only seems to last a few months at best. I think that going home brings the worst parts out, and then he returns to school and I have to start all over again. He's getting old enough that I may have to do something permanent to him. I will not allow him to become a new Dark Wizard trying to take over the country."

Sirius looked upset as he listened. He then turned to his godson. "And part of his bullying includes you and your friends?"

Harry nodded and quietly said, "Any chance he can get away with it."

A determined look came over the man and he coldly said, "Technically, Draco has an obligation to me with Lucius permanently unavailable. I shall speak to Narcissa about this too." His expression softened and he looked fondly at Harry. "Don't worry

about Draco any more. If he continues on this way, please let me know and I will take care of it.”

“But...”

“Harry, this is why you have a godfather, and one who understands these types of things.” Sirius sighed. “I have so much to teach you.”

Ginny added her two Knuts worth. “Harry, please listen to him. This is what I’ve been trying to explain to you. Draco will respond to this, or as we discussed the other day, Fate will apply a correction. Wizarding families stand behind one another, but there are family expectations too. Draco’s mother knows this; she knows what it means to be a Black.”

Harry looked back and forth between the two, thinking about it. “OK, if you insist.”

Sirius grinned and slapped him on the shoulder. “I do. Now, let’s take the trays back downstairs and drop them off. I’ll take a quick trip home to put a certain locket in a safe place, and then we can spend some time in the shops.”

“Are you still feeling OK, Sirius?” Harry asked caringly.

“Yes, lad, I’m much better than a week ago. Let’s go.”

Downstairs, Sirius took a quick trip back to his house to put the locket in a safe place. There was no reason for it to be stolen while he stayed at the Leaky Cauldron, but no one wanted to take any chances on losing what they had found.

Once Sirius returned, the three of them walked around Diagon Alley. Harry wanted to buy a few things, so they headed to Gringotts. All three of them got into a cart and went down to Harry’s vault.

When they got to Harry’s vault, he got out after the goblin. As the door was opened, Sirius stayed in the cart, but Ginny got out to join him. “Harry, do you mind if I go with you? There is something I’ve always wondered about.” She looked at him and wondered if he

would say yes or no. In the old timeline, she had never had the opportunity to go into his trust vault.

Harry shrugged. "If you want."

Ginny could not help but notice the Weasleys' family vault was one size smaller than Harry's trust vault, and theirs was mostly empty when she had gone down with her parents last summer. She was not bothered by the difference, but the difference was hard to miss. Of course now, the profits from the basilisk parts made the vault not so empty.

There was a sizeable mound of gold in the middle, which Harry started taking from to fill his money bag. She walked towards the back and saw a low shelf running all the way across. In the very middle, which would be hidden from the door area by the mound of gold unless you walked around it, was a book. It so reminded her of Riddle's diary that she shuddered. "Harry? Come look at this."

A moment later, he joined her.

"I think you need to get that," she whispered. "It may give you more information."

Harry walked over and retrieved the book. Opening it up, he looked at the first page. A few seconds later, his head snapped up and he looked intently at her. "It my mother's diary," he said breathlessly.

She looked over his shoulder to read it with him. On the inside cover was the name "Lily Evans/Potter". The "/Potter" had obviously been added later. Ginny continued to whisper. "This must be how you found the extra information about your family."

"You mean in the other time?" He whispered too.

"Yeah."

Harry flipped through the book. It was almost filled. Only a dozen or so pages in the back were blank. "Thanks Ginny!"

“Sure. I had wondered if there was anything else in here, but I really didn’t know. Come on, we better get going.” She returned to the cart.

Harry got back into the cart, cradling his new book. The goblin started them traveling up to the lobby.

“What do you have, Harry?” Sirius asked with curiosity showing.

“Ginny found a book in my vault I’ve never seen before. It seems to be my mother’s. I can’t wait to read it,” he said with a big smile on his face.

“Knowing your mother, I’m sure it will be interesting,” he said with a grin. “Did you know it was there, Ginny?”

“No, I didn’t. I had wondered if there was more than gold there and went in to see. I saw it in the back.” She shrugged, not sure what else to say, or could be said in front of the goblin in the cart.

When the cart arrived at the lobby, Harry held his new book tightly, as if afraid it would get lost. They walked around for a bit. Sirius pulled him into a shop that catered to Muggle-borns and those who liked the Muggle fashions. There, he bought Harry a number of sets of clothes, and told Harry to burn most of the things from the Dursleys, as his godson would wear the best. Ginny was happy to see Harry so happy. A stop to see Madam Malkin got him a few sets of robes that were of a higher quality than he had ever had before.

Their next stop was at Quality Quidditch Supplies. After hearing a sales person gush about the new Firebolt broom to a customer, Ginny could not help but smirk, when Sirius bought one for Harry for missing twelve years of Christmases and birthdays. Ron would probably burst something when he saw Harry’s new broom.

The afternoon was almost over when they returned to Sirius’s rented room. Since it was almost time for them to go home and Sirius was getting tired, Harry and Ginny left for The Burrow at half five.

When they got home, Ron did indeed go spare at Harry's new broom. Ginny was pleased to see that her brother's jealousy was very limited. Her mother also stopped her and raised an eyebrow in question.

Ginny smiled and said, "Everything's fine, Mum, just fine." She watched her mother smile and start to hum as she returned to the kitchen to finish making dinner. Ginny just knew her mother was planning a wedding now. She shook her head and walked outside to watch Harry try out his new broom.

They were getting closer finishing off Voldemort.

((A/N: I've tried to portray Sirius as being mostly normal, yet with some effects from staying in Azkaban for 12 years. Hopefully, that came across.))

Chapter 12 - Death All Around

The evening after visiting Sirius and telling him her secret, Ginny was already getting ready for her next task while she talked with others at The Burrow. When the rest of her family was busy, she had sent Harry to get his Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder's Map and put them in her room. With a few sips of Pepperup potion to give her a little extra energy, she donned Harry's Invisibility Cloak and Apparated to Hogsmeade. Once in the area, so she could do a short distance Apparation with precision, she thought very carefully about a tunnel below the local candy store and Apparated there. Having gone through the tunnel a few times in the old timeline was the only thing that allowed her to come here the easy way. If she had not been in the tunnel before, she would have had to break into the candy shop to get to the trapdoor over the underground tunnel, and she did not want to risk getting caught that way.

Ginny lit her wand and hurried through the tunnel. When she came to the backside of the opening into Hogwarts, she stopped and did a number of revealing spells. She was unable to detect any alarm charms or defensive wards. Dumbledore was so lax with security, she thought as she pulled out the Marauder's Map. Activating the map, she looked over it. Dumbledore was in his quarters next to his office, Filch was in his quarters, and Hagrid was in his hut. Not another soul seemed to be on the map other than her.

Leaving the Invisibility Cloak on for safety from ghosts and portraits, Ginny gave the password and entered the school. After two steps, she noticed that even her quiet footsteps seemed very loud, so she put a Silencing charm on her feet. She hurried to Myrtle's bathroom. A quick check of the Map showed all the adults to be in the same place as last time. She hoped that Mrs Norris was napping and being a good kitty.

Inside the bathroom, she found the tunnel locked open. That was expected since the Chamber of Secrets was now considered to be part of the school. If it had not been open, she would have had to return and get Harry to help. She hurried down the many steps.

Down in the chamber, she went to the store area for the unsold basilisk parts. Ginny felt a little bad about doing this, as if she was stealing, but she promised herself she would return the slightly used fang as soon as she could. There were many boxes, crates, and barrels. A simple Summoning charm made the box with the fang easy to find. She opened it to make sure the fang had venom in it, and she saw a drop hanging onto the end of the tooth. The only reason the venom was not eating through the container was because the container had been spelled by Snape to resist the venom's effects.

After shrinking the container and putting it into a pocket in her robes, she retraced her steps, checking the Map to make sure there were no surprise walks in the night by any of the three residents. Forty minutes later, she was in bed with a deadly weapon hidden in her closet. The thought of what her mother would say if she knew that almost made her giggle.

In the privacy of her bedroom before she went down for breakfast on Monday morning, Ginny dictated a letter. This was the weakest part of the plan because a number of things were outside of her control and she was having to rely heavily on "what normally happens" and on other people in an organization not normally known for its signs of intelligence.

With the letter in her pocket for later, she went to Harry's room while he was in the shower to have a "talk" with Hedwig. Although the conversation was very one-sided, the owl seemed happy to help her after she explained her desire to help Harry. After a last caress on soft feathers before the owl flew out the window, Ginny left Harry's room just as he was coming back from the bathroom with only a towel around his waist.

Ginny's mouth went dry as she could not help but look him over. He was only about to turn thirteen, but she could tell he had been regularly doing his exercises. That and his eating regularly for the last year made a nice difference. The twelve year-old part of her liked what she saw and knew it would only get better. With an impish grin,

she said, "My, Harry, if I knew I'd get a show like this, I'd come up to visit Hedwig every morning."

He had already started to blush at seeing her, but her comment turned him a deep red that went all the way down to his shoulders. He seemed to have lost the power of speech as well.

She winked and started to walk out of the room. "I'll see you at breakfast."

Harry scurried into his room. As he passed her, he whispered, "That's so not fair," just before he hurriedly closed his door.

Ginny just chuckled as she went downstairs. Merlin, he was fun to tease.

Her mother looked at her as she came down. "Good morning, Ginny. What's so funny?"

Ginny realized her grin was still all over her face. "Harry. He tried to dash from the bathroom to his bedroom in just his towel and got caught." Her mother got a smile on her face too. "He's so fun to tease." Ginny watched a more calculating look slowly come over her mother as her mother looked at her, a look that filled her with dread, if the look meant what she thought it did.

"Ginny, dear, I think you and I need to have a little talk after breakfast, so don't go running away afterward."

She was horrified as she had already done this once and it was bad enough the first time. "Mum!"

"You're almost twelve and are around a lot of thirteen-year-old boys. A lot of social changes start happening in a girl's third year," her mother calmly told her as she finished making toast, handing her daughter the plate of toasted bread.

"Mum, I already know about all of that stuff," she said in an almost pleading voice. All fun thoughts of Harry were gone.

Her mother waved her towards the table and grabbed some more dishes of food. "I think I'm a much better source of good information than gossip in a dorm. I remember what that was like. We can also talk about how young ladies should act in various social gatherings. I believe Sirius will be hosting a few parties over the next year or two and you need to know those things too."

Ginny helped set the table, although she really wanted to hit her head on it. This was going to be worse than the last time around.

Ginny had enjoyed seeing Harry in his new clothes at breakfast. It was a nice indication of what he would grow into over the next few years. Then her mother had come into the room and spotted her staring at Harry and given her a knowing smirk. In the end, that had made their "little talk about boy and girls" just that much more embarrassing for her. The positive was that her father had not told her mother about being caught in Harry's room as she was sure something would have been said about the incident; she was thankful for her father's discretion. Their mother/daughter talk had taken all morning and she was so relieved when her mother had to end it so she could start making sandwiches for lunch.

Harry found her when she was setting the table for lunch. "Where have you been?"

"Talking with my mother," she said in controlled tone.

"Oh, what about? You were gone the whole morning." He sat down and grabbed the pitcher to pour himself a drink.

Ginny could hear her brothers coming, so she said, "I'll tell you later." As Harry looked at her, Ron and the twins came rushing into the room for the mid-day meal. Harry just shrugged and grabbed a sandwich before they all disappeared.

Everyone conversed about Quidditch, even after Percy came down to join them. Percy offered only a few comments about the sport and left

as soon as he was done eating. Ron and the twins more than made up for Percy's limited conversation.

When Ginny took her plate to the kitchen and placed it into the sink, her mother told her, "Be sure to change into something a little nicer before you go. You want to look presentable."

It was all she could do not to roll her eyes. "It doesn't matter, Mum, we're just going to be talking and maybe walking around in Diagon Alley."

Her mother stood a little straighter and her left hand went to her hip. "Ginny, you never know when it will matter. Remember what we talked about this morning?"

She was going to hex Sirius into next week for putting ideas into her mother's head. "Yes, Mum," she finally said. While it was not disrespectfully said, there was no doubt she agreed only to prevent an argument. Turning quickly on her heel, she left before more could be said. She would change, but she would also take a small bag of other clothes.

Twenty minutes later, she had her small bag of more normal clothes, along with Harry's very special cloak and a few other small things. Harry joined her and they took the Floo to meet up with Sirius.

Sirius was sitting at a table near the fireplace drinking a Butterbeer. Empty plates were on the table in front of him. He grinned as they walked over to him. "My, don't you two look nice together?"

That comment just started her ire going again and made Harry blush a little. She leaned towards him and spoke only loudly enough for him and Harry to hear. "Sirius, I will thank you to keep those comments to yourself and not put any more ideas into my mother's head. It is hard enough being her only daughter and no matter how much fun it may be for you, it's not making Harry's life any easier either. And if you don't stop, I may hex you into next week."

The grin slowly slid from his face as he looked carefully at her. Without a word he got up and motioned them to follow him. He took

them upstairs to his room, locking the door and putting privacy spells over it. He waved them to the chairs in his room as he said, "Explain."

"You really don't understand?"

"It's just a little fun, a little teasing; it's not even a prank."

She sighed and slowly counted to three. "I can take a little teasing." Her voice now started to rise a little. "The problem is that you come back acting all high and uppity like a Pureblood scion trying to play matchmaker, which plays into one of my mother's fantasies for her only daughter." She was now sounding firm and a little angry. "That causes a lot of attention to be paid to both of us, attention we need to avoid to get our mission done." She had just barely stopped herself from adding "you idiot" onto the end of her rant. Sirius acted so contrary. At times he was very formal; and others, he was like a big brother.

"Ginny..." Sirius started, but was interrupted.

"A month, can't you hold your tongue for a month? We might be done by then and we'll be off to school. Then you can fill my mother's head with whatever ideas you want. Just lay off for a month!" Memories of the talk this morning continued to fuel her anger.

Sirius looked at Harry, who just sat there not saying a word and looking at his hands in his lap. She knew she was more upset than she really should be, but it felt good to let all of that out. They were so close, why could he not see that?

A blank mask finally slid over the man's face. "Miss Weasley, I offer you my deepest apologies. I let my desire for fun have a little too much free reign, and I was not totally aware of the situation with your mother. Please accept my apology and my promise of no more teasing on this matter with your mother for the next month," he said formally.

Ginny sat there for a moment and stared at him. The about-face was, well, she was not sure what to call it, but shocking was the best she could come up with. A quick glance at Harry showed him to be

surprised too. She wondered if this was normal for him or a change from his stay in prison.

Deciding that she should match him, she gave him a firm nod. "I accept your apology and your promise, Mr Black. Thank you for your understanding."

He returned the nod before a grin broke back out. "Since your mother isn't here,' he said playfully, "I will say that you two do look cute together."

Ginny shook her head and looked at Harry. He had a look that seemed to be of the "grit his teeth and bear it" variety, hoping it all went away on its own. Trying to change the topic to something, anything, else that was not so annoying, she said, "I need to go to the Diagon Alley Post Office at three and then I'll be gone taking care of a problem until about seven. When I return, we can have a quick dinner before Harry and I have to go home. Has Hedwig shown up yet?"

"Hedwig? Why would she be here?" Harry asked in slight alarm.

"Don't know, I'll check." Sirius got up and went over to the window. Each room had a special box and ledge outside its window.

"I hope you don't mind, Harry, but I need to borrow her to help me. I talked to her about it this morning and she seemed agreeable," Ginny replied.

Sirius shut the window and returned to his seat. "She's there. What are you going to do?" He looked at her intently.

She glanced at Harry, who was very interested too. "I'm going to send a letter to the Ministry, and then I need Hedwig to deliver a few letters for me. Beyond that, I'm not sure I want to say until I know if my plan works or not."

"Is there a chance you'll get hurt in doing this?" Sirius asked carefully.

"No, and Hedwig won't either." Harry looked relieved. "I just need an owl who's really intelligent to deliver some things."

Ginny was surprised when Sirius said, "This is about the Lestranges, isn't it?"

She nodded. "I have an idea that's easy to do and I might get lucky. I'll tell you how it works out afterward."

Sirius was silent and Harry looked like he wanted to argue, but he held his questions too.

Ginny glanced at her watch. "We have about an hour. What do you want to do in the meantime?" The other two seemed to change mental gears, based on their expressions. They were not going to argue with her, and she felt relieved.

"I, uh, I was wondering if we could get my glasses looked at," Harry said with some hesitation. "It's been a long time, and well, I don't think they work as well as they used to."

Sirius look hurt. "Harry! Why didn't you say something sooner? I can't believe I didn't think of having your eyes checked. Come on, let go do that now."

As they left the room, Ginny asked, "Harry, have you ever thought about contacts?"

When they left the eye Healer's shop, Ginny thought every girl in Hogwarts owed her, not that she would allow them to enjoy the benefits as much as she planned to. Harry had gotten contacts and his eyes were more gorgeous than ever before since they were not hidden behind glasses. Better still, they would change with his needs and keep dust and other things out of his eyes. Magical contacts did not have to be removed and cleaned like Muggle ones did either. Magic was very handy at times. She even wondered if they would help him to become an even better Seeker than he already was.

While Harry was getting his eyes examined, Sirius had left saying he had to run a quick errand in Knockturn Alley. When he returned, he

whispered to her that he had ordered the phoenix tears and offered a thousand Galleon bonus if the man could get them in the next three weeks.

After a stop by the Post Office to mail her letter, they all went back to Sirius's room and Ginny went behind a changing screen and donned the older clothes she had brought with her. She also dug into her bag and pulled out some small scraps of cloth, a pair of Omnioculars, and a shrunken broom, putting them all into pockets. Lastly, she pulled out a cloak to make her look non-descript and Harry's Invisibility cloak.

"I can't wait to hear about this," Sirius commented as he watched her prepare.

"Me too," Harry added.

Ginny opened the window and pulled Hedwig in. "The truly sad part is that I need to do this today just to be sure I don't miss an opportunity, but the reality is, I probably won't have to do anything until tomorrow." She opened her black cloak and pulled Hedwig in, holding the owl close to her body, then she closed the cloak. She was obviously hiding something because of the bulge in her cloak, but she doubted anyone would say anything.

"Hey, Harry." Sirius nudged his godson with his elbow. "I bet you'd like to be where your owl is right now, wouldn't you?"

Almost anyone, she amended mentally before she quickly drew her wand and soundlessly shot a Stinging hex at the man, hitting him in the chest.

"Ow! Why'd you do that?" he complained. "Your mother isn't here."

Ginny smiled sweetly. "No, she isn't and I'm not upset either. I'm just returning your tease." She swore she would prank him good one day. "And Sirius, while I'm gone, this might be a good opportunity to talk to Harry about girls, since his git of an Uncle never would have had that sort of talk with him." It was mean of her to do, but Harry really did need to know and she far preferred Sirius doing it than her father.

The idea of her father having that conversation with Harry gave her the shivers.

Sirius looked at her in confusion for second before he suddenly brightened. "Oh, right, right." He looked down at Harry with an impish grin, which caused Harry to look scared. "Brilliant idea, Ginny. You said you wouldn't be back until seven?"

"Correct."

"That will give us plenty of time. Yes," he drawled, "plenty of time. On with you then, and do be careful," he encouraged her.

"Yeah, be careful Ginny." Harry looked like he wanted to hug her.

She was not sure if he did not do so because of his own owl under her cloak or because of his godfather standing there, but she assumed the latter. "Don't worry, I will."

Ginny left them and went downstairs to the Apparation point through the wards of the place. "Harry is going to kill me for what he has to endure for the next few hours, but I hope he understands that it's for a good reason," she thought. The mental image of an old wizard saying that made her mentally cringe. Ginny hoped Harry did not see her like their Headmaster.

Four hours later, a bored and slightly tired Ginny Apparated back to the Leaky Cauldron and went upstairs and knocked on a door. Sirius opened it and waved her in. Inside, she found a very embarrassed looking Harry who also looked a little glassy-eyed as he sat in his chair.

She opened her cloak and let Hedwig out she before rounded on Sirius. "What have you done to him?" she angrily hissed. Ginny did not remember pulling her wand out, but it was in her hand and in front of Sirius's face.

"Whoa there, Ginny. Nothing's really wrong." He took a step back.

“Nothing’s wrong?” She took a step forward. “Then explain to me why he can’t see straight right now.” If she did not know better, she would say he had been drinking, but there were no glasses or a bottle out.

Sirius took another step back and hit the door.

Ginny took another step forward and inwardly smirked at having him trapped and scared of a twelve year-old girl, or at least, she looked twelve. Right now, she was feeling every bit of her twenty-one years and he was messing with her Harry. “Start talking, now!” she commanded. It was with great satisfaction that she noticed sweat was starting to appear on Sirius’s forehead.

“I, uh, I know how it looks, Ginny,” he started hesitantly, “but nothing really happened other than we had a talk about wizards and witches, and little wizards and witches.” He looked a little shifty as he said that.

She let her wand waver slightly.

“All right,” he quickly said as his resolve buckled. “Look, it was a difficult talk and I thought one little shot of Firewhiskey would help...”

“A shot of Firewhiskey!” she screeched. Her wand moved to right between his eyes.

“All right, it was two; but I swear to Merlin that was all!” He looked to be pleading for his life.

“He’s only thirteen, for Merlin’s sake!” She was beside herself in anger. How could he do that?

“I know, and I made sure they were small, but they really did help. Trust me, Ginny, it really was the best way,” he said almost pleadingly.

She looked over her shoulder and saw Harry watching them carefully, almost as if he was forcing himself to do so. Unable to stop her temper, a pale green spell came out of her wand and hit Sirius in the face. He fell to his knees while she turned and went over to Harry.

Reaching back to old memories, she cast a Sobering charm on him. It would not take away all of the effects of being drunk, but it would take away the worst parts and allow him to function.

Harry groaned and put his face into his hands. A muffled, "Oh, my head," came out.

"I'll get something for that Harry. Just hold on for a few minutes," she told him as softly as she could.

Turning, she saw Sirius was still fighting with the little green bats circling him. She cast a Silencing spell at him so as not to disturb Harry and then left the room. Downstairs, Tom was happy to sell her a Headache potion. Back in the room, she gave the potion to Harry who quaffed it gratefully, although he would not look at her in the face. She noted that Sirius had dispelled the bat bogies.

She sighed. "Come on, Harry. Let's go home. I'm sure Mum will have something left over, or else she'll be happy to make dinner for you. We'll leave the prat to drink adult beverages on his own." She gave Sirius a glare, who did look ashamed.

Ginny let Hedwig out the window and told her to fly back to The Burrow. "Pay attention to Wednesday's paper." She skipped telling Sirius good-night or any other pleasantries. Grabbing her bag, she guided Harry out.

"Night, Sirius," Harry called out as they left.

"Are you OK, Harry?" she asked as they walked down to the main room to Floo home.

"Yeah, I'm fine. How did things go for you?" he asked timidly, still not looking at her.

"Boring. I didn't think anything would happen and I was right. I'll just have to get up early in the morning to take care of it."

He still would not look at her. This was going to have to be taken care of before she returned home, she thought. So she pulled him over to the side of the room away from everyone else.

“Harry, you’re going to have to let it go and act normal or everyone at home will know that something is up.”

He nodded, but still did not look at her.

“Harry look at me.”

He slowly lifted his head, but he was beet red.

“Look, if it will make you feel any better, I know exactly how you feel...”

“I really don’t think so,” he whispered, letting his eyes go down as his head stayed up.

“Actually, I do, because my mother gave me the ‘little wizards and witches’ talk this morning.” His eyes came up and locked onto hers. “Yes, that’s where I was all morning. Talking about that and about how I’m supposed to behave at social gatherings like a prim and proper young witch who wants to be courted.”

Harry slowly grinned and silently chuckled. “At least I didn’t have to hear about social gatherings.”

“Lucky you,” she said with a smile. “So we’ve both been embarrassed today, but we have to keep the stiff upper lip and all that crap.” He grinned more at her joke. “That’s better. Now let’s go home. We can tell Mum that Sirius kept us out all afternoon walking around Diagon Alley and being a man forgot about dinner. Mum will be all sympathetic and probably not ask much about our day, and we’ll get a good meal out of it. How about it?”

“OK,” Harry said, much more at ease than a few minutes ago.

When they got home, Ginny went upstairs and dropped all of her stuff off. Back downstairs, she found her mother giving Harry a hug while

making much about his eyes and lack of glasses. Her mother was also promising him she would feed him. Since everyone else had already eaten, the two had a great meal with no one else there and shared a number of knowing looks between brown eyes and green eyes with nothing between them. It was a lovely time, Ginny thought.

Earlier that afternoon, Minister Bones was looking over a document describing Britain's response to a request from Germany. Just as she was about to finish, her assistant came in and handed her a letter, the type of which she had not seen for over a year. With concern about what she might be warned of, she read it.

Dear Minister Bones,

I want you to know that I appreciate all of the work you and your colleagues have done over the past couple of years to clean up the criminal element. I know a little of that work was started with my letters, but you've done the hard part and I thank you for that.

I'm writing because there is a loose end that I've been recently made aware of and one that only you can take care of. It would be to your and our society's benefit to bring the three Lestranges from Azkaban to the Ministry for questioning. You'll want to give them Veritaserum and ask about some very special Dark artifacts they were given, artifacts which may allow Voldemort to return to life one day.

Again, I'm sorry, I can't tell you how I know this, only that it is important and that I'm just...

A concerned citizen who wants to see justice

Bones wondered about this letter. The timing of it was very interesting, as both Lestrangle brothers had just recently failed a medical exam in Azkaban. While Bellatrix was still considered sane -- barely, the two men were only borderline sane and would not be so for long. Was there a connection? Could she know without bringing them here? Would the men even have any useful information or was it all lost

forever now? After a few minutes of tossing questions around in her mind with no answers appearing, she sent for Shacklebolt.

"You asked to see me, Minister?" the Director of the DMLE asked as he walked into her office.

"Close the door, please." She reached over to her left and picked up a letter and a form from the desk. When he sat, she handed both of them to him. "This is a transfer order for the Lestranges. Bring them to the Ministry and question them thoroughly."

"About?"

"Read the letter." She watched him put the transfer form on the bottom so he could read the letter. He looked up a moment later. "I have received two other letters from this individual and both of them have been spot on. While I believe Voldemort to be dead, it would be unwise not to check this information anyway. I'm aware of at least two different Dark rituals he could have used to prolong his death to return at a later date. If there is any possibility at all, I want to know as soon as possible."

Shacklebolt took a deep breath as he considered that. "Back into another war? That's not a pleasant thought."

"No, it's not," she said gravely.

"It's late enough in the day, I think it would be best to transfer them early in the morning, according to normal routine," he suggested.

"Fine. Make it so. I want a report on what you find as soon as possible."

"Yes, Minister."

As Bones started to return to her previous work, she again wondered why she had thought the decision to take this position was a good one. The memory of the letter reminded her that she would take it seriously; Fudge would not have. She would find out what was going on tomorrow.

The next morning, Ginny woke at sunrise. Lest she forget something, she very carefully got ready, checking three times before she left. The last thing she did before she Apparated out of her room was to gently pick up Hedwig and hold her gently to her body.

Arriving on the north coast of Scotland, Hedwig gave a soft indignant hoot.

"I know you don't care for that, Hedwig, but I didn't want to leave you here last night. Harry would never forgive me if I let something happen to you, not that I would forgive myself either. You're just too special."

The owl sort of cooed, apparently mollified.

Ginny conjured a perch on the side of a tree with a platform on it and set the owl on it and began to wait again. Suddenly realizing she had forgotten something, she hastily pulled out Harry's Invisibility Cloak and put it on. She also cast an illusion of some branches and leaves in front of Hedwig's perch. Since they were in a copse of trees, an owl would not be out of place, but she would be. She also pulled out the Omnioculars and started scanning the watery horizon of the North Sea in front of her.

Every few minutes, she would look to the water again, and checking the small dock that only magical people could see, but she saw nothing. That there was no boat at the dock was a good sign, she thought. The boat had been there the entire time she had hidden here yesterday.

Hedwig suddenly gave a soft hoot, so Ginny looked out again. There, slightly to her left on the horizon was a small boat heading this way. Digging into her pocket, she pulled out three scraps of cloth. She had wanted something that was light but heavier than parchment. "Just a few minutes more, girl," Ginny softly said, watching the boat get closer.

Finally, the boat got close enough that she was able to make out faces in the Omnioculars. With a smile she said, "We're in luck,

Hedwig. They've made it easy on you." She put the viewing device back into a pocket and drew her wand.

Ginny put one scrap of cloth on the platform in front of her. It had "Rabastan" written on it. She tapped her wand to it and cast, "Portus". "You can take that on in your left claw; it won't go off until it hits a wizard. Fly in slow and drop it on the head of the first prisoner. His name is Rabastan Lestrangle."

Hedwig hooted and picked it up with her left claw.

She put another cloth with a name on it down on the perch. "This one can go in your right claw and is for Rodolphus Lestrangle. Drop it on the head of the second prisoner. Portus." Hedwig took that cloth.

"And this one," Ginny laid the last one on the platform, "is for the last prisoner, Bellatrix Lestrangle. You'll have to carry it in your beak. After you drop it on her head, you can fly home."

Hedwig hooted and picked up the last cloth in her beak.

"Oh, one last thing, I need to make you hard to see." Ginny cast a Disillusionment charm on the owl.

Hedwig did not seem to like that and made angry sounds, even with the cloth in her beak.

"I'm sorry, Hedwig, but if I did not do that, they might hurt you, and I wouldn't ever forgive myself if that happened."

The owl quieted down.

"Go on and deliver the letters so we can make Harry safe. The invisibility charm will wear off on your flight back. I'll even find you some extra juicy mice when you get home." Ginny felt the feathers of a wing rub against her cheek. Apparently she was forgiven. "Go on now, and safe flight." She heard the owl fly away.

Ginny Vanished the perch and platform Hedwig had been on before she pulled her Omnioculars back out. The boat was getting close to

the shore and the prisoners in their striped garb were easy to see. A few minutes later, she watched the three prisoners disappear in quick succession out of the boat. The four guards looked like they were panicking based on the way they were looking around in every direction, which she understood. They were about two hundred yards out and started the boat moving towards the shore as fast as possible.

Suddenly, screaming filled the air. The guards all looked towards the shore. There was a sickening thump at the edge of the water on the rocks and the screaming abruptly ended. Ginny took one look at the body and knew it was a corpse. While she regretted taking life, she felt no remorse for this one. Or the next one that landed about five seconds later about twenty yards to the left. Or the last one that landed another five seconds after that about fifty yards to the right of the first.

Just because one normally made the height coordinate of a Portkey zero to land on the ground, did not mean that was the only value you could use, she thought with a smirk. Three different height values guaranteed the order of landing.

She watched the Aurors check out the grisly scene on the shore. As long as they reported the order of death correctly, then all was good. Her job here done; she Apparated back to her room. While she put her stuff away, she mentally congratulated herself on a job well done, as well as mentally thanking Shackbolt for telling her how Aurors did their work, including Azkaban transfers, in the other timeline.

Her task completed, she happily went downstairs to breakfast and then to spend the day with Harry and her brothers. There was no need to tell Harry anything, the joyous look on her face said it all and he understood, giving her a nod. She would give him the details later and he could tell Sirius on his next visit. They were one small step closer to permanently getting rid of a Dark Wizard.

Somehow, she did not feel so joyous as the day wore on. Harry kept to himself most of the day, not even spending time with Ron. When she went flying for a few minutes in the afternoon, she saw him sitting on top of the house and he seemed to be watching her very intently. Ginny hoped that meant that he was thinking about her and maybe

thinking about asking her out. However, that thought was quickly dispelled that evening as Harry continued to be very quiet and even went to bed early. She recognized it as one of his brooding moods and that he was thinking about something important, but she had no idea what.

Wednesday morning, Ginny was up early and arrived downstairs before her father left for work. It was not hard to read the front page of the newspaper in his hands. While he held it up reading the inside, she looked at the headlines that proclaimed the death of three former Death Eaters. Once Sirius saw that, he would go to Gringotts and claim Bella's vault to get the cup. They were so close she could almost feel the victory. She had to purposefully think of something else to calm herself.

Deciding that flying would take her mind off of waiting, she went outside before any of her brothers were up and took to the air on her broom. There was something about wind blowing over her face and whipping through her hair that was relaxing. Or maybe it was the peace and quiet and feeling of freedom that did it: nothing and no one crowding you or rushing you.

Slowly turning as she reached the end of the paddock, she looked down and back towards the house. She spotted Harry outside doing his exercises. She had to give him credit for his decision to stick with them. He did them four mornings a week while she did hers only two. He would probably never bulk up, like some boys did, but he would have a solid strength.

Not long into the summer, Ron had risen early one morning and saw Harry doing them. He had laughed at Harry saying they were a waste of time. With a grin, Harry had challenged her brother to an arm-wrestling contest. When Harry quickly won three straight bouts, Ron was not as cocky, but he still thought it a waste of time as he thought Quidditch would keep him in shape. While Ginny had grinned at that, Harry outright laughed and pointed out that Quidditch was played sitting down. If Ron was lucky, he would build up shoulder muscles eventually, but he would never have any real stamina or overall strength. Her brother had not argued, but he had walked away with a sour look on his face. Ginny had immediately made plans to get Harry

a weight set for Christmas. Visions of him working out when he was sixteen had danced in her head.

About forty minutes later, Harry and Ron came out and joined her in the air. Ron had their old Quaffle, which they tossed around just for fun. Harry had lost the sudden moodiness he had had yesterday and it was a pleasant way to spend a summer morning.

During lunch, a voice called out from the fireplace. "Harry? Harry!"

Harry jumped up and ran to the fireplace. Ginny and Ron got up and stood in the doorway to see who it was, although Ginny knew the voice instantly.

"Sirius!"

"Hey kiddo, I'd like you to come visit me this afternoon so I can show you my family house. It's not totally ready yet, but enough of it is done that I can move in soon. I thought you'd like to see where you're going to live after this summer."

"Really?" Harry asked excitedly. "I can live with you?"

"Really, really. And ask your..." he paused and then asked, "Is Molly in the room?"

Harry looked around and only saw Ginny and Ron in the doorway.

"No," he answered.

"Great, then ask your girlfriend to come too."

"Sirius! Quit it." Harry was blushing.

"I've got something she'll want to see," the man went on as if Harry had not interrupted him.

"I am so going to kill him," Ginny muttered when she noticed that Ron was looking between the fireplace and her. She looked to her brother. "And don't you start teasing me too."

Ron quickly shook his head. "Why is he doing it?"

"Because he has a death wish," she said quietly and intensely.

"But I thought you liked Harry," he said quietly.

She watched Harry talking to Sirius for a moment. "Liking someone and getting mercilessly teased about it are two different things," she replied.

Ron nodded. "Your teases aren't too bad compared to being teased by Fred and George."

Ginny smiled and put an arm over his shoulders to give him a side hug. "Thanks, Ron."

He shrugged before a strange look came to his face. "Mum told me about Sirius and what he's doing."

Ginny froze, wondering where this was going.

"She said that while she and Dad would never force you into anything, there were steps short of an arrangement that could be done." He looked at her almost with sadness. "I've never really thought about the custom before, but it's not very fair for you, is it?"

She was so relieved to know what he was talking about now, as well as surprised to see a thoughtful Ron at thirteen. "No, but I wouldn't mind if it was with Harry. He really is a nice person." She wondered about the future. "Would you be upset if Harry and I got together?"

He looked at her and then back to Harry, who was still talking to his godfather. "No, I don't think so. Harry's a pretty good bloke and I think of him like a brother sometimes. It all seems kinda sudden though." When she acknowledged that with a nod, he returned to the table and his lunch.

Sirius's face soon disappeared from the fireplace and Harry went to go talk to her mother. He came back in a minute all smiles. When

Ginny looked at him, he said, "Your mum says we can go after lunch as long as we're home by dinner." He looked at Ron and then back at her before touching a finger to a tooth.

She looked at Ron and saw that he was looking down at his plate, scraping the last few bites off. Ginny looked back up and nodded. She was so excited she practically inhaled the last of her lunch and then ran up to her room.

A few minutes later, she was back downstairs with a special box hidden in her light summer cloak. When Harry joined her, she took the Floo to go meet Sirius. Harry came out right behind her.

"Hey, you two," Sirius greeted them, not letting them walk away from the fireplace. "I've already added you to the wards on the Floo. Just turn around and go to 'The Black Family House'. Say it just like that."

Ginny grabbed some Floo Powder off the mantle while Sirius put three Knuts in the donation pot and traveled to Sirius's house. She could hardly wait to see what had been done to it.

As expected, she came out of the fireplace in the basement kitchen. She had barely stepped out of the way when she realized how nice it all looked. It was clean and bright. It was also a lot roomier than in the old timeline. She heard the other two join her, but she was still amazed by what she saw.

"Looks nice," Harry said.

"Thank you, Harry. You should have seen it before. It was very dirty and depressing," Sirius explained. "The company I hired to fix it all up had a number of elves to do the work. Not only are they discreet, but they can do a lot of magic quickly. They've also expanded the room; it was so narrow and hard to get around in before. Anyway, come this way. There's a store room we can use for our task." He led them through a doorway that Ginny did not remember being there in the other timeline. She wondered if the elves had created it with some new excavation, or if it had been hidden.

Sirius waved his wand and lights came on all around the room, making it easy to see. He pulled a box out of his robes and set it on the table, which had four chairs; the only furniture in the room. He then walked over to a built-in cabinet and used his wand to unlock it. He brought a slightly smaller box over and set it on the table too. With two taps of his wand, the tops of the boxes popped off. Inside one was the Slytherin gold locket, and in the other one was Hufflepuff's teacup with an image of a badger on the side.

"Well done," she told him as she gazed at the teacup.

"It was on a shelf on the back wall. Of course, it took about eight forms and two hours to go over all the paperwork to get into the vault -- the idiot goblins and their forms," he said with disgust in his voice. "Do you have your part?"

She looked at Harry, who seemed to be alternating between being excited and very nervous. Reaching into her robes, she pulled out a slender box. "Of course, it won't be of any use without the tears." With her wand, Ginny canceled the shrinking charm.

Sirius grinned and pulled a small phial of a pearly liquid out of his robes and laid it on the table. "For six thousand Galleons, I have five tears. I checked this morning on the way to Gringotts and found out they had come in late yesterday."

Ginny grinned as she picked up the phial and examined it. "Got a clean toothpick or cotton swab? We need to test it to make sure they are the real thing."

"I did that before I paid, but it doesn't hurt to do it again." He walked over to the cabinet and pulled out a cotton swab on a long stick and handed it to her. He also set a small knife down on the table as if he knew she would want to test it herself, and he was right.

Ginny open the phial and touch the swab to the cap, barely getting it wet, before she closed the phial. Setting it down, she picked up the knife and gave herself a small cut. Finally, she touched the swab to the cut spreading the moisture on the swab around. It took a few

seconds, but the cut closed up and left no scar. She beamed at Sirius and Harry.

"This is it, isn't it?" Harry asked. "The last of the Horcruxes and the means to destroy them."

The end of her mission, her destiny, Ginny thought soberly. The end of her hard work for the last two years. The reason for her to defy fate and time. "This is it, Harry," she quietly agreed. "Are you ready or do you need a little time to get ready?"

Harry looked like he was eager to do it, but he did not answer immediately.

"You can wait if you want, Harry," Sirius said kindly. "An extra day or two shouldn't matter."

"No, no, I want to do it now." Harry looked at him and then at her. "I want this over with. Which one do we destroy first?"

"The one in you first, Harry," she said and he nodded. "Harry, this will hurt and it's possible this may make you weak enough that we don't finish until tomorrow. There nothing wrong with that if it happens." He nodded again.

She opened the box with the fang and unwrapped it, being very careful not to touch it. "Oh bloody hell... I forgot my dragon hide gloves."

"You mean like the ones used in Potions?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah, I thought they would make it safer to handle."

"Hold on, there's probably some in the house." He left to go look.

She watched Harry stare at the fang. "Are you really all right?" she softly asked.

He nodded, as if not wanting to say anything, and in a way she understood. After a long moment, he said, "I just can't believe I have

a piece of Him in me and no one ever said anything.” He looked at her as if thinking very hard. “If the Killing Curse doesn’t leave a mark, why do I have a curse scar? And since I do, why didn’t anyone ever suspect something was wrong with it?”

Ginny wanted to laugh, but for his sake she contained her mirth to a wry smile. “Because those are logical questions and the Wizarding World doesn’t have much logic, Harry.” He scowled and she chuckled. “I know, not a very comforting answer, but I don’t have any other. When you feel like up to it, ask Dumbledore and see what he says.”

“I might do that one day…”

“You may get your chance sooner than you think,” she said with a grin.

“Why?”

Sirius came striding in with a pair of gloves. “Found them in my old school trunk. They still seem good though.” He handed them to Harry who put them on and checked them for holes.

When Harry was satisfied, he looked at Ginny. “Why might I ask Dumbledore sooner?”

“Because, in the other timeline, when we took the soul fragment out of you and the wound was healed, your scar became almost non-existent. If that happens this time too, then Dumbledore will surely notice it sometime this year and ask about it. You can ignore it and tell him it’s none of his business, or you can use it to ask him your questions.” She shrugged. “It’s your choice.”

Harry looked thoughtful for a moment before he smiled. “I could lose my scar, huh? Awesome!”

Ginny and Sirius both laughed.

“Ready?” his godfather asked him.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.” Harry reached down and picked up the fang.

"Here, let me help," Ginny told him. She brushed his hair away from his forehead. "Now turn it around so it points towards you. Sirius, get the tears and have them ready." Once the fang was pointed towards him, Ginny held his wrists and moved the fang until it was positioned right over his scar. It was slightly amusing to watch him go cross-eyed trying to watch the tip of the fang. "It's about a half inch over your scar, Harry. Just jab it towards you."

"Er, can I kill myself this way? I mean, what happens if I jab too hard and it goes into my brain?" he asked nervously.

"You have something called a skull, Harry," Sirius told him teasingly, to help dispel the fear.

"Oh, right," he said sheepishly. He looked at Ginny. "Is it still in the right place?"

She moved it slightly. "Whenever you're ready, Harry. And Harry?" He looked her right in the eyes. "It will work and I'll be right here to take care of you."

Harry gave her a small grin before a look of determination came over him. Suddenly, Harry's hands moved and the fang bit into the flesh on his forehead causing blood to spurt out. Harry screamed and started collapsing, causing him to pull the fang away from him and to fall to the floor.

Ginny grabbed his shirt to slow his fall. Damn! I should have had him lie down, she thought as she helped him down.

"Harry!" Sirius rushed over, kneeling down as Ginny let his body rest on the floor. "Move your hand, Ginny, I have to pour this in!" The uncapped phial was moving towards Harry's head.

"No, wait, it's not time." She had to shout over Harry's screaming.

"What do you mean?! Look at him! Listen to him! He's in agony!"

"I know!" Tears were welling in her eyes to see him like this. "It's not gone yet!"

Sirius was looking tortured as well as he watched Harry's screams turn into very loud moans and groans. "How do you know? I can't wait, I have to give him this!"

"No!" She grabbed his wrist to stop him despite the tears now streaming down her face. It hurt her to see him hurt, but he had to go through this.

Suddenly Harry's groan became a scream again and a green mist leaked out of Harry's scar.

When the mist completely dissipated a few seconds later, Ginny shouted, "Now!"

Sirius did not hesitate and he did not care about anything but Harry as he dumped the entire phial onto Harry bleeding wound. Smoke instantly came out of the wound for the next five or so seconds and Harry's screams stopped -- the silence was frightening after all the noise. As the smoke dissipated, they could see the scar healing and closing as they watched. Half a minute later, the wound was completely closed and Harry was slowly breathing. That had been one of the longest minutes of Ginny's life.

"He lived," Sirius hoarsely choked out, concern in his face and posture as he watched his godson. He gently shook Harry's shoulder. "Harry? Harry?"

Harry's eyes fluttered and he moaned. "Did you see the Bludger that hit me?" he weakly asked.

Sirius's barking laughter filled the room. "Oh Merlin, Harry. Is Quidditch really all you can think about?"

"No, it's just what I feel like at the moment." He looked to his other side at her. "You said it would hurt, but bloody hell, hurt doesn't even begin to describe what that felt like."

Ginny weakly smiled at him. "Sorry, Harry," she gently said. "I knew it would hurt, but not how bad. I guess the way we did it in the other timeline didn't hurt as much."

"At least you didn't soil yourself, Harry," Sirius comment with a grin. "That would have been embarrassing."

"There's no way I'd do that," he replied with a grin too. Then he became more serious and looked at her. "Ginny? Did it work?"

"I believe so. We saw a green mist come out of your scar and your scar is different, much thinner. In fact, it's almost invisible." She stroked his forehead, as if moving hair away, just so she could touch him to show she cared. "How do you feel now?"

"Tired, but fine." He looked at the ceiling. "You know, I feel a little lighter too, like I've lost a weight I've been carrying around. It's a strange feeling, but nice."

Ginny grinned. "Perfect, that's what your other self said too. I think you'll find yourself a little more powerful too, because your magic had a small but constant drain trying to contain the soul fragment."

"That could be useful," he said a little mischievously. "So, now what?"

"How about we get you up and let you rest for a few minutes?" Ginny suggested. "Then if you still feel up to it, you can destroy the last two Horcruxes."

Sirius took one arm and Ginny took the other. Harry mostly stood on his own, but they had to steady him. He gratefully sat down in a chair.

"Let me have your glove, Harry," Ginny requested.

He took his right one off and handed it over. She picked up the fang and set it back on its protective wrapper. There was a small divot in the floor where some of the venom had leaked out. She handed the glove back and he put it back on.

Ginny moved the box with the locket in front of him.

"What do I do?" he asked.

"Just stab it," she told him. "Stab it and hold it in place. The venom will do the rest."

Harry picked up the fang again, and with no hesitation, stabbed the locket. It made an eerie squeal before green mist came out of it too. "That was easy," he said enthusiastically as he looked at the partially melted locket.

Ginny laughed. "Only because you have the fang. One more and we're done, Harry." It was with a light heart and much anticipation that she moved the box with the cup over in front of him. "Same process, Harry."

With a big grin, he stabbed the cup. For a few seconds, nothing happened. "What's wrong?" he asked worriedly.

Before Ginny could answer, the cup started a slow eerie squeal too. "There's not much venom left," she shouted over the squeal. "It's taking longer. Just keep holding it there." It took over a minute, but green mist finally came out of the cup and it cracked.

"And?" Sirius asked.

"And we're done, probably," Ginny said with a lot of confidence despite the qualifier.

"Probably?" Sirius asked.

Ginny smiled as she helped Harry put the fang back in the wrapper so she could put it in the box. "Remember, I said that if Voldemort was in spirit form now, he should go away now. If he's possessing some animal, he'll disappear when the animal dies or he tries to transfer to another animal." She closed the box and Harry took the gloves off.

"How do we know when he's really gone?" Sirius would not let up.

“By talking to your friend and our Potions teacher,” Ginny said teasingly. “We ask him if his Dark Mark is gone and if it is, then we’re done.”

Sirius laughed. “He’d hex us before he’d answer that.”

“You perhaps,” Ginny said as she stood, “but not us. While not quite friends, Harry and I have a respectful relationship with him. He’ll answer the question from us. Now we only have one more thing to do,” she said happily as she looked at Harry.

“What?” he asked, looking confused. “I thought we were done.”

She hauled him to his feet. “We have to celebrate!” Ginny wrapped him in a hug. She was thrilled when he hugged her back. When she heard Sirius laughing, she whispered, “Thank you, Harry. You don’t know how much it means to me to have this done.”

“I don’t have a prophecy hanging over me now,” he whispered back, “so I can guess what it means.”

“I can show you better,” she impishly whispered. When he did not say anything, she leaned back and looked into his gorgeous green eyes. As he looked at her questioningly, she leaned forward and gently kissed him on the lips. It was chaste and only for a few seconds, but she enjoyed it. His eyes went wide and Sirius’s laugh became louder. Ginny just pulled him back into a hug. “There’s more where that came from when you’re ready, Harry.” She pulled back and saw a stunned Harry, which she found amusing. His stunned look slowly changed into something a little more serious, but she was not sure what it meant.

Ginny turned to Sirius who was only chuckling now and gave him a quick hug. “Thanks for all of your help.” He gave her a quick hug back. “So, do you have any Butterbeer here?”

“No, but I can be back in a few minutes with some.” Sirius turned and left after he playfully slapped Harry on the shoulder.

Harry was looking at her thoughtfully, so Ginny left him alone and cleaned up, shrinking and putting the box with the fang back into her pocket and the rest of the stuff back in Sirius's cabinet. When Sirius returned, they spent the rest of the afternoon talking and joking, most of it in the little storeroom.

Sirius also took them upstairs to show them the first floor, which was mostly done now. Ginny was amazed at the difference in the house. It was so much more "light and airy" feeling. The portrait of his mother was gone now, as were all the ugly elf heads.

The library was the highlight of the tour. Inside, Ginny saw that it was greatly expanded and there were many more bookshelves than before. There was also a familiar elf stocking arranging all the books. He stopped working and looked at them as they entered.

Sirius stood up very straight and formal. "Ginny, Harry, I'd like you to meet my personal elf and the elf of the Black Family: Dobby. Dobby, this is my godson, Harry Potter, who will be living with us and who can also give you orders."

Dobby, dressed in a clean but simple uniform, bowed very low. "Dobby is pleased to meet and serve the great Harry Potter and the great and kind Ginny Weasley."

"You!" Harry exclaimed and Dobby cringed. Sirius looked confused.

Ginny laid a hand on his arm. "Harry, he was trying to help you, but remember that he was having to go against his family at the time to do the right thing. He has a good and noble heart."

Harry hung his head. "You're right; I was just very surprised."

Sirius was still confused looking. "What am I missing?"

Ginny smiled. "Last summer, Dobby knew that Lucius Malfoy was trying to hurt the Wizarding World, and Harry specifically, so he tried to keep Harry away from the school. However, I knew about the danger too and destroyed it." She gave Sirius a pointed look, which

he figured out a moment later and nodded. "In the process, I too met Dobby last year, which is why I made my suggestion to you."

"Ah, that makes more sense now," Sirius said before he turned and went to a desk. "I didn't have any trouble getting Dobby or the books. Narcissa was short on cash and the fact that she could get some without anyone outside of family knowing was a big incentive." He grabbed a book off of the desk and handed it to her. "I believe you wanted this?"

She read the title and smiled. Flipping it open and going about three-quarters of the way through it, she found her time traveling spell. "Thank you, Sirius. I know exactly what to do with this."

"Are you going to destroy it?" he asked. It did not look like he cared if she did, but more like he was simply curious.

"No. I think I'll seal it with some special magic and then put it in my vault. Perhaps one of my descendants will need it to fight another Dark Wizard." She looked at Harry and he had an agreeable look on his face. When she looked at Sirius, she saw an amused look. Was she really that obvious with her feelings, she wondered?

Returning home, Ginny and Harry had big smiles on their faces. Her mother looked at her with some concern and suspicion, which Ginny knew she had to immediately lay to rest.

"Mum, Sirius showed us part of his family house and where Harry will be living after this summer. It's so cool!"

Her mother brightened. "Harry, I'm so happy for you." She rushed over and gave Harry a hug.

While her mother was occupied with Harry, she looked at her father. He was giving her a strange smile. It did not take long for her to work out that he was thinking that while he might not have to worry about her in Harry's room at night, he did have to worry about her at Harry's house. She just smiled happily at him and then turned back to watch Harry. Watching Harry was always enjoyable.

((A/N: Whew! We've reach one of the high points of the story. Don't worry, the story is not over. There are still a few things left for Ginny (and others) to do. I wanted to title the chapter "Mission Accomplished", but that would have given too much away. :-))

Chapter 13 - Changes

August eleventh finally came and Ginevra turned twelve. Ginny was twenty-one and holding for the next nine years as far as she was concerned. Still, it was her birthday and she planned to enjoy it as much as possible.

When lunchtime came, the festivities started. Sirius came over, as did Hermione (who was recently back from a family holiday trip to the continent). Sirius had formally greeted Hermione, which caused the young witch to blush when her hand was kissed. After that, Sirius became his more casual and care-free self. They had all of Ginny's favorite foods, including a chocolate birthday cake.

Finally, it was time for presents. Ginny never thought of presents as the main reason for a birthday party, as Ron did, but she would admit to herself that it was a fun part. It was fun to see what imaginative things people would get for gifts.

"Here, Ginny." Her father handed her a wrapped present. The box was a little over a yard long and not very big around. "It's from your mother and me. Bill and Charlie chipped in too."

Ginny ripped the paper off and there was a brand new Shooting Star. "Wow! Thanks!" She told them as she admired her new broom. "This will be great for when I get on the Quidditch team at school."

"That's not going to happen any time soon," Ron said, "not with the Chasers and Seeker we have now."

"I want to be a Chaser, Ron," she said as she ran her hand over the broom shaft, before inspecting the tail twigs. "I can wait a couple of years if I need to." She looked back up at her parents and beamed. "Thanks!"

"You're welcome, dear," her mother told her, also with a smile.

Ginny set the broom down and took the next present passed to her. It was from Percy. Unwrapping it, she found a book on Nordic Runes.

“That will supplement what you have in class, as it discusses how Nordic Runes can be combined with other forms. I thought you might like it since I saw you reading Harry’s book so avidly,” Percy explained.

“Thanks, Percy. I’m sure it will be helpful to me.” She flashed him a smile as she put the book next to the broom before she took a present from Ron. Opening it, she found a box of assorted chocolates. “Thanks, Ron. These look really delicious.”

Ron smiled back at her. “Mum said a girl can never have too much chocolate.”

Ginny laughed, and then laughed harder when her mother gave Ron a strange look. Apparently, her brother had misinterpreted some comment her mother had made. It would be amusing to know what had been really said.

Hermione passed her present to Ginny. Unwrapping it, Ginny found a box of hair things: bows, braid holders, a little mirror, barrettes, and some hair combs.

“Thank you, Hermione. This will be really helpful.” Ginny admired everything in the box.

“I thought it would be. You seem to like to do different things with your hair, and I thought this might help.”

“Yes it will,” Ginny said with a smile as she set it down by the broom.

Sirius handed her a present that was not very big around, but about a foot tall and heavy. She wondered what it was as she unwrapped it. She opened the box and pulled out a white vase made of marble.

“Very pretty; thank you Sirius.”

“I think it will come in handy in the coming years. It has a Stay-Fresh charm on it, so the flowers you put in it will last five times as long as they normally would,” Sirius told her.

"That's very generous, Sirius," her mother said.

The man shrugged. "It was something that I saw in the store and thought she'd like, as well as be useful."

"It is." Ginny set it down and picked up the last present. She had purposefully saved it to last. Ginny was not sure what Harry had gotten her in the flat rectangular box, about the size to hold a shirt. She was sure Sirius would have influenced this gift, but Harry had been acting a bit strange for the last weeks, ever since he had spent that one day brooding.

Unwrapping it and opening the box, Ginny pulled out an ornate wooden picture frame that held a picture of her family from the last holidays when they had all been together. Everyone was waving and having a good time.

"Thank you, Harry. That's very sweet of you." She gave him a big smile and he blushed.

"It's not an ordinary frame," Harry finally said, as he got over the initial embarrassment. "It will hold up to five pictures and if you tap your wand on it, it will change to the next picture. Sirius got the picture of your family for me from your mother."

Ginny pulled out her wand and tapped the frame. The picture change to be only Harry, who standing there and looking mostly proud of himself, although there was a hint of shyness. She grinned at him and he blushed again, this time looking down. With another tap of her wand, the picture of her family came back. "There are only the two pictures in it now?"

"Er, yeah. I didn't know who you might want to put in it," Harry said. "There are instructions on the back of it for how to add and remove pictures."

"Thank you, Harry. It's very nice." Ginny set the present down and then stood to walk over to Harry. She gave him a hug, which he returned, although too briefly. It again reminded her that something

was not quite right. Ginny went around the circle, hugging everyone and again telling them thank you for their present.

Another round of cake and ice cream was started and they all enjoyed the time talking, or so it seemed to Ginny. After eating, she, Harry, Ron, and Hermione went outside, going down by the pond to talk. Hermione told them about her trip and she listened carefully as the other three told her about their summer. Hermione paid special attention to Harry when he told of Pettigrew's capture and getting to know Sirius. Ginny and Harry purposefully left out their special adventure.

She enjoyed the relaxing time, spending most of it watching Harry. Again she had the observation that he was acting differently somehow. He was still friendly to her and talking to her, but there was something between them, something that was preventing the closeness they had before. It had started after his brooding time, which had been right after they had destroyed Voldemort. That confused her, as that should have been a very happy time. He was happy, just not very happy; it perplexed her. As Harry continued to talk, she carefully examined her memories of the last week. Hermione's presence forced Ginny to stay in the conversation and for her self-examination to be slow, but she could come up with nothing that should have caused this.

Despite her concern, the four had a wonderful time for the rest of the afternoon.

After dinner, Ginny's father Side-Along Apparated Hermione home and Ron challenged Harry to a game of chess. Harry agreed, but not before getting Ron to agree to explain the moves as they played. (Once Harry told Ron that if he were to explain why he made some of his moves so Harry could learn, he would get better and could give Ron more challenging games in the future.)

Her father returned after the game was underway and Ginny went to meet him at the door. "Dad, can we talk outside for a few minutes?"

“Of course, Ginny.” He led her outside, holding the door open for her. As they started around the back garden, he put his hand on her shoulder and asked, “What seems to be on your mind that you don’t want the boys to hear?”

She looked up at him. “Was it that obvious?”

“To me, but probably not to them. Let’s try the bench, shall we?” He sat down and waited patiently.

Ginny joined him. “Dad, does Mum ever surprise you? You know, doing things you don’t expect after you’ve been married for so long?”

He chuckled. “Probably only on a weekly basis, now. When we first got married, I probably would have said on an hourly basis. Why do you ask? Is someone surprising you?”

She nodded. “I know I don’t know everything about Harry, so I know I shouldn’t really be surprised by what he does, but it seems like he’s been acting strangely around me lately and I don’t know why.”

“Have you had a fight with him recently?”

“No. I’d understand if we had. Things have been pretty normal. He seems a little more distant for some reason,” she said in a slightly worried voice.

Her father looked at her for a moment. “What was the last big thing you remember happening before this change?”

Ginny considered that. “We were spending time with Sirius. He was showing us his new house and the three of us spent a fun afternoon together. Nothing really bad happened that I can remember.” Not counting being stabbed by a basilisk fang, but we healed that, she thought.

“I see.” He looked thoughtful for a moment. “You do realize that Harry will not be living here after this summer, do you not?”

“Yes. I know he’ll only be over here for visits.”

“Perhaps that has something to do with it. Maybe he’s starting to come to terms with a change in his family situation. He now has a father figure in his life that he’s never had before, someone to care for him even when other adults may not,” he suggested.

Something about her father’s words triggered a memory. She had told him she would always be there for him and later teased him about them doing something together next summer. Had he figured out what she had meant? Then an alarming thought occurred. Had he figured out the one big secret she had not told him?

“Ginny. Ginny?” Her father’s voice cut through her thoughts. “Is there something wrong?”

She knew what she needed to do. She had tried hard not to tell him, but she had also opened her big mouth in teasing him and had probably given him too much information. She had been stupid and not given him enough credit for solving problems.

“Yeah, I suddenly remembered that I said something in fun that may have hurt his feelings.” It was only partially true, but it was something her father would understand. “Dad, can you help me with something?”

“If I can, but if you’ve done something wrong, you’ll need to be the one to fix it.”

“I know. I just...” She sighed as she thought about what she was going to have to do. “Can you please go back in and get Harry to come out here when he finishes his game?”

He chuckled. “I can do something that simple. Would you like me to keep everyone else inside, too?”

“Would you, please?” She gave him her best innocent and pleading look.

“Of course,” he said with a fatherly smile. “It will be getting dark soon, but I think he knows where this bench is.”

"I... we," she corrected herself, "will stay here."

Her father reached over to grab her shoulder, pulling her over so he could kiss the top of head. "I'm glad you've figured out what's wrong, and I'm proud of you for trying to fix it."

"Thanks, Dad," she said with a sad voice. "But it would have been better not to have made the mistake to begin with."

"True, but as I recall, earlier this summer someone said that no one is perfect." He gave her shoulder a squeeze and stood up, walking into the house.

Ginny sat there for a moment, considering the irony of her words to Dumbledore and her mother coming back at her. She sighed and started thinking about what she would say to Harry, whenever he came out.

It was recently dark and almost half an hour later when she heard the back door open. She watched the outline of a person from the light in the house walk towards her. "Your dad said you wanted to talk to me about something important?" He sounded like her Harry when he had said that -- very to the point.

"Yes, I do. Have a seat, this may take awhile."

He sat and she could barely make out his face in the low moonlight as the white orb started to rise. It looked very neutral. "As long as our last big conversation?"

Ginny winced internally. She did not know if he meant it as a slap at her, but she took it that way. She could have shared her last secret then.

"Maybe," she finally said as she slid her wand out. "Sit still for a second, I would feel better with a little more privacy. Muffliato."

"What was that?" Fortunately, he did not sound concerned, mostly just curious.

"It's a spell to muffle our conversation. To anyone else, it will sound something like an insect buzzing around."

"That's cool," he said, sounding a little excited. "Can you teach me that one?"

"Sure." The moment was here and she could not put it off any longer. "Harry, I've noticed that you've been acting a little differently recently." He stiffened. "This is my fault, isn't it?"

He looked down. "I don't know," he finally said.

She took a slow and deep breath before continuing. She was a little frustrated by that answer, but held it in. "How can you not know? Either I did something wrong and you're mad at me, or I didn't."

Harry still would not look at her. "You know it's hard to talk about this, right?"

"Yeah, but if we don't, it will only get worse and I really don't want to lose my best friend." The memory of their first big conversation returned with her reaction when she had told him that. She purposefully put her hands on the bench, gripping it hard, so she would not try to hug him and hold him.

"You're probably right," he slowly admitted.

"And?" she prompted when he did not say more.

Harry continued to look down, as if thinking hard. "You've said that you left out details as you told me the story about when you came from, but there was something bigger than a detail about us that you left out, wasn't there?" He now turned his head and looked at her, looking straight into her eyes. He held her gaze, daring her to tell the truth.

"Yes," she finally admitted as if it had been dragged out, before she quickly rushed on to say, "but I had a very good reason."

"I suppose it was something for the greater good, wasn't it?" he asked mildly, but it cut her to the quick.

Ginny clinched the bench tighter to try to avoid crying at the words he had used -- at the image he had invoked. He had compared her to Dumbledore, someone she had said he could not fully trust. She could not hold it and dropped her face down to her knees, her hands coming up to hide her. Sobs started to come out as she could hold them back no longer. She had lost his full trust.

She was not sure how long she had cried, but it was at least a minute or two. When she got herself under control so that she was only sniffling, she turned her head and saw him still sitting there, his face a mask of indifference in the slowly growing moonlight. "Can I," she sniffled again, "can I at least explain?"

He shrugged. "If you want."

His indifference hurt and almost made her start crying again. She wondered if her attempt to repair the breach between them would succeed. Slowly she sat back up. Pulling her wand back out, she conjured a tissue to dry her eyes and wipe her nose. She Vanished it before putting her wand back up. "I was afraid -- Harry..." She was not sure she could go on at the moment.

"Afraid of what?" he asked in a monotone

The luxury of ignoring this was not present; she had to tell him. "I was afraid of effectively forcing you to do something, Harry. I was afraid that if I told you what we had been in my first timeline, that you would think it had to be or, perhaps, that you would think that I expected it, and so you'd do it for only that reason; but I didn't want that. I want you so badly, Harry, but I also want you to make that choice because you want to, not because you feel compelled. Do you understand? Please tell me you honestly understand."

He did not look surprised at her revelation, not one bit. She had had a small hope that he had thought the problem to be something else, but that did not appear to be.

"I understand your reasoning," he said.

She started to relax, until he spoke again.

"But your reasoning was wrong. If you're going to try to come back and, and claim me," his voice rose slightly, "shouldn't you have told me and given me the choice directly?"

"No, it wasn't like that," she forcefully argued. "Yes, I wanted us to be together again. Yes, I did my best to make myself look good in your eyes, just like any girl would. But I'd never do anything to force you to pick me, or to claim you, as you put it. I wanted you to be happy and I thought you'd be happiest with me because we've been happy together before. Is it so wrong of me to want you to be happy?"

Harry stared at her for a long moment. "No," he finally said. "No, it's never wrong to want someone else to be happy, but how..." he paused for a second, "why you do that can be wrong. It's part of what I struggled with when I realized the truth."

"The day you brooded after everything we did?"

"I did not brood," he said succinctly.

"OK, the day you sat around looking depressed and wouldn't talk to anyone?" A small part of her good humor started to return.

He made a sound like a growl. "Whatever. How long? How long were we married? And did we have children?"

Her good humor quickly departed and she was again the contrite little girl. "Only for a year before the Final Battle and no, no children. We wanted to wait until the war was over to start a family."

"And you want that back with me?"

"Yes. No!" She quickly corrected herself when she realized what that must sound like. "Yes, I want us to get together one day when you're older, but for now, I just want us to be best friends. Even as wonderful

as it was to for us to be married, having you as my best friend was the best part of our relationship.”

He thought for a moment. The calm and almost cold Harry returned. “Please tell me what your plans were for us. I want to know all of your intentions.”

She probably did owe him that. “I planned to be your best friend and help you where I could until fourth year. While there is no need for it now, in your other fourth year, there was a big tournament at the school.” She decided to leave out the fact that Harry had been entered as a contestant. There was no need to give him more stress at the moment. “There was traditionally a Yule Ball with it. I had hoped that if that happened again, you’d take me to that and we’d start to date because of that. Beyond that, I had no real plans, other than to be the best girlfriend I could until you wanted to make it permanent.” When he looked up at the stars and did not say anything for a while, she asked, “How upset are you at me?”

He sat there a while longer. “I don’t know, and that’s part of the problem.” He still would not look at her. “Part of me is really upset with you, as it feels like you were ... using me or something like that. And yet, I can understand your reasoning, now that you tell me. But when I didn’t know that, the only positive things I could think about was the sacrifice you’d made to come back and save me from all the horror of having to fight Voldemort and of having to deal with Sirius dying. You’ve also rescued me from having to live with the Dursleys and given me Sirius to go live with from now on.

“When I first realized you had married, uh, the other me, it wasn’t hard to understand that you wanted to make that happen again. I mean, if I had a family and lost them, I’d probably do anything to get them back too. But I’m not that me.” He groaned for a second. “This time stuff is so difficult.”

She smiled slightly at his predicament.

“Despite how many good things you’re doing, you have no automatic right to this me, or to expect me to be more than a friend to you. I’m

very thankful of the problems you've saved me from, but I don't think that means I have to marry you. Do you?"

"No," Ginny said quietly as she shook her head. "I never meant it like that; you do understand my intentions." She considered what else needed to be said. "I enjoy teasing and flirting with you, and the other you enjoyed it, as well as flirting back with me. Besides being your best friend, I only wanted to make myself look like a good choice for a girlfriend, Harry. I would never force you to do anything, even now."

He nodded. "I do thank you for that, as well as what you did for me concerning Voldemort and the Dursleys."

"Anytime, Harry." When he did not say anything more for a minute, she asked, "So now what?"

"I don't totally know. I am thankful for what you did, so I'll always be your friend, and I've been trying to do that. But you also acted just like Dumbledore in not telling me something important that affected me."

Ginny hung her head. "It was only with the one thing, and it was possible you would not have picked me anyway. I gave you that choice."

He ran his fingers through his hair. "I suppose that is the crux of the matter: choice. I'll also admit that you've been good about giving me choices, even on this. I wish you had handled this differently, though."

She softly snorted. "Me too, but hindsight is always perfect."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, no one is perfect. Isn't that what you said to him?"

"Please, not you too," she ended in a groan.

"Me too, what?" he asked.

"Before he sent you out, my father reminded me of what I said to Dumbledore. I know I'm not perfect. All I can say is that I try my best." What more was there to say, she thought.

Harry nodded, staying quiet for a moment. "Ginny, I guess you'll have to give me some time. I understand better now, but I'm still a little upset. Is there anything else important you haven't told me about?"

"No," she quickly told him. "Nothing else important." She looked at him, trying her best to hold his gaze. "You'll still be my friend?"

A slow smile came over him. "Yes, I'll still be your friend. Come here." He held his arms open and she hurriedly scooted over. His hug felt so good, especially after what she had been through this evening. "As for whether I'll be your boyfriend, you'll have to wait. I know you're a girl, like I know there are other girls too. I'm not sure Ron's figured that out yet, but I have."

Ginny giggled and sat up straight as he let her go.

"To be honest, I don't care about having a girlfriend right now, not like the older boys do," he said very matter-of-factly before he shrugged. "Maybe next year."

"I'll wait," she told him. "I'll wait as long as I have to, but it will always be your choice, Harry."

"Thanks. Well, I think I'll go in and go to bed early. It's been a long day." He stood, but she did not. "Are you coming too?"

"In a few minutes. Oh, wait." She pulled out her wand and cancelled the muffling charm. "There, now you'll sound normal to everyone else."

"Right. Thanks, Ginny."

"You're welcome, Harry." She watched him walk into the house. A few minutes later, a light came on in Bill's old room. She contemplated the conversation and where they were now. At least they had friendship and there were no more secrets, but she wondered how much she had damaged Harry's trust in her and how long it would take to rebuild that. He seemed to understand what she

had been thinking, but he was obviously still hurt. She hoped time would heal this wound soon.

Ginny got up and walked inside. Her father looked up at her from the book he had been reading with a questioning look, but it was Ron who asked the first question.

"Did he hurt you?" Ron asked protectively.

She almost laughed, but he did not understand how ludicrous that question was. "No, Ron. I hurt him, but I think we've worked it out."

All anger and protectiveness vanished from her brother. A glance at her father showed him to be smiling.

"I think I'll go to bed. Good-night everyone." Ginny went upstairs, thankful that her mother was not there to quiz her.

Narcissa Malfoy walked into her parlor and looked around. She snapped her fingers and called, "Winny!"

A house-elf popped in. "Yes, Mistress."

"Tea for three and some biscuits, the strawberry frosted ones if you can get them."

"Yes, Mistress." The elf popped out.

Narcissa looked around the room, her eyes searching for something expensive, but not finding anything. Over the last few months, she had sold everything of real value she could find. Her cousin had been the biggest help, but all the fines she had had to pay for her husband's misdeeds had taken everything in their vault and then most everything else she could get her hands on. She had even had to sell all of their properties and businesses to stay afloat.

She had appreciated Sirius's help a week ago more than she could tell him -- literally. Pride did prevent some things from happening, even with family -- which took her to the heart of the upcoming

meeting. Sirius had put a question to her that was very difficult and the day had come for her to give an answer.

A still portrait of her family on the wall caught her attention and brought an ugly reality to her. Lucius would never be here again and she wondered if she had already lost her son. Sixteen years of marriage and what did she have to show for it?

The house-elf popped back in with a tray at the same time the knocker on the front door sounded. "Set it on table. I'll pour after I answer the door."

"Yes, Mistress."

Narcissa looked in the mirror near the door. She looked perfect as always, at least on the outside. On the inside, well, she was about to try to fix that. She opened the door.

"Cousin Narcissa." Sirius gave her a bow.

"Good afternoon, my Lord," she said graciously with a small bow and curtsy. "Please come in. I have tea in the parlor."

"Thank you. How have you been?" he asked as they walked.

"You know how it is. One does what one can," she said as she led him into the parlor.

"Oh, my favorites," he said happily as he picked up a biscuit with strawberry icing on it. "I'm surprised you remembered."

She chuckled. "How could I not, considering how many of them I saw you eat when we were younger?" She poured him some tea, added sugar and a spot of milk before handing him the cup and saucer. "Are you doing well since we last spoke?"

"Splendid. One might even say I've had a brilliant week." He took a sip of his tea. "So, shall we discuss the main question, or was there something else you wanted to talk about first?"

Narcissa gave him a polite smile. "You always were straight to the point, unless there was a prank to be played." He gave her a big smile. "If I take you up on your offer, what are the details of your conditions?"

Sirius set his tea down for a moment, waving his hand as he talked. "You can have your choice of a flat in London or a cottage near Liverpool, free of charge. I'll also give you a thousand Galleon stipend per month. It won't allow you a life of complete luxury, but enough of one that you can keep up your image. I'd also advise you to arrange to keep your last house-elf; it will make things much easier on you. Lastly, when you find an arrangement that you desire, I'm quite willing to negotiate for you, with your desires firmly in mind."

She had expected most of that. The help with a future marriage arrangement was a nice addition. "And my son?" This could be a sticky part.

He shrugged and reached for tea. "That's up to him, but as you know, there will be certain expectations that must be agreed to."

That had been expected too. She glanced back up at the portrait, seeing herself staring down and mocking her in her present situation, not that her father had given her much of a choice sixteen years ago.

"Very well, I accept." She snapped her fingers and called, "Winny."

The elf popped in. "Yes, Mistress."

"Winny, please pay attention." She turned back to her guest. "Sirius Black, will you buy my house-elf for one Galleon, with the promise to resell her to me at a time of my choice for the same price?"

"I will." Sirius reached into his robes. A moment later, he flipped a Galleon to Narcissa.

She frowned at his impertinence as she caught the coin. "Winny, this is your new master, Sirius Black." The elf looked scared, but there was nothing she could do.

Sirius smiled and gently said, "Winny, for your first task, I ask you to serve your former Mistress, Narcissa Malfoy -- soon to be Narcissa Black, until I tell you otherwise."

"Yes, Master." The little elf looked much relieved.

"You have nothing to fear, Winny, but you must belong to me for the time being." A mischievous smile came over him. "In fact, would you please go find young Draco and tell him that his mother desires to speak with him here? Please remember that he can not give you any orders now."

Winny looked happy. "Yes, Master." She left with a pop.

"Very calculating, Narcissa. I see that you have not forgotten the ways of the Blacks."

"Merlin forbid. I just have not been able to use those ways as often as I'd like." Anger washed over her and she said with distaste, "Lucius did not allow me to have 'ideas above my station'."

Sirius grimaced. "Well, that will be taken care of. How do you think young Draco will choose?"

She sighed. "I'm afraid I can not fully say. His father has filled his head with unrealistic ideas and I have been unable to show him the true way."

"Pity," Sirius softly said before he finished his tea.

Narcissa took his cup and saucer and refilled it, making it as he liked it. She also refilled hers and then made the third cup. The third one was placed on a small table near a chair just as her son came into the room.

"What did you want, Mother?" It was said with disdain, as if his time was being wasted.

"Greet our guest, Draco, then take a seat and enjoy your tea as we talk," she said smoothly, ignoring his disrespect, hopefully for the last

time. She would not tolerate it in the future, as she would have no restrictions then.

Draco turned and saw the man for the first time. "Sirius Black?" he said, very surprised.

Sirius stood. "I am, however, you would do well to call me Lord Black at the moment, or Mr Black if you prefer, Master Malfoy," he said formally.

The boy stared for a moment.

"Draco, you will greet him and treat him with respect, as he is extended family and over you," she firmly whispered.

That seemed to snap Draco out of wherever he had mentally gone. He bowed his head slightly. "Good afternoon, Mr Black." He held out his hand and Sirius shook it.

Sirius sat back down and picked up his tea. Draco did the same, as did Narcissa.

"Master Malfoy, I come today with an offer for you, a one-time offer; but perhaps I should explain a few things to you."

Draco looked gleeful, she noted with disgust. Well, he would find out that all may not be as he thinks.

"Now that I am in my rightful place," Sirius said, "I intended to return the Noble House of Black to its former glory. My first step was to correct an error my parents made. Your Aunt Andromeda is now fully restored to the family, as is her daughter."

"But, but she married a Mu..."

"Draco!" She cut him off before he could get himself into more trouble. "Mind your tongue and who you're talking to. Also remember the history of the House of Black."

The boy looked at her calculatingly before he said, "My apologies for interrupting, Mr Black."

"Thank you, but please see that you don't do that again," Sirius told him with an intense look. "As I was saying, your Aunt Andromeda is back in the family. I've also noted that your father has not held up his end of the marriage contract he signed with the House of Black."

Draco looked unhappy, but held his tongue.

"Therefore, I have given your mother the opportunity to have me break the contract and she has decided to accept and become a Black again." Sirius paused. An outburst was obviously about to come.

"Mother! How could you!"

"Very simple." Her calm answer was a stark contrast to his outburst, which amused her. "Your father was careless and got himself caught. Because of his carelessness, the House of Malfoy is essentially without any of its former power and is disgraced. The marriage contract he signed was very clear as to keeping a good reputation and providing me with the luxuries of life. He has failed and has no hope of ever fulfilling that contract. In fact, he might even die in prison before you finish your education." She watched her son go through shock and surprise. She had tried to hint at this before, but he had never listened. She did truly love her son, but she wondered if he loved her. Narcissa supposed she was about to find out. She had never truly loved Lucius; it had been a marriage for family politics.

Sirius gently cleared his throat. "So, Master Malfoy, you have a decision in front of you. You may stay with your mother and become a Black as well, leaving the name and heritage of Malfoy behind. If you do, I will become your head of family and all that implies. Or, you may stay a Malfoy and attempt to go your own way. As you can guess, each choice has its advantages and disadvantages. You may choose now, or if you like, we can discuss this while your mother and I give you advice before you make your decision."

Draco became angry. "Why would I want to listen to you when you're doing this to my family?" he snarled at them.

Despite the fact that Sirius calmly sat there, Narcissa was appalled. "Have I taught you nothing? Show him respect," she told him with more than a hint of anger in her voice. "If you're stupid enough to make a decision of this magnitude without any advice at the age of thirteen, then you are truly the spoiled child of your father and deserve precisely what you will get by remaining a Malfoy."

That shut her son up and she was glad; but then, she should know how to get his attention. "Now, if you will apologize for your uncivilized behavior, we will give you useful information and advice. If you think you know what you're in for already, then make a choice." She glared at him as only a mother could and he shrank back into his chair.

"My apologies, Mr Black." He glanced at his mother and hastily added, "And to you as well, Mother. I'm afraid my surprise got the better of me."

"Accepted," Sirius said, his demeanor not changing.

"That's better, Draco," she softly said. "Now, what questions do you have?"

He appeared to be having to work to control himself, but Draco managed a civil question. "What does it mean to be a Black?"

"An excellent first question," Sirius told him. "I would become your Head of House and patron. Any action of significance that you plan to take must be approved by me because it reflects on our house. If you do not do so, and your actions have severe negative consequences, you can expect to deal with those on your own and you may even be cast out of the house. You would still have your mother as your guardian, as you do now, living with her when not in school. You would also have to start acting like a Black. We are not spoiled children," Draco bristled but kept quiet, "and we do not bully others. We know our place and use subtlety and cunning to accomplish our goals. We understand the traditions of our world, but we are not

opposed to ignoring those traditions when they become outdated. We are progressive and we lead our world. Most importantly to your everyday life, you will always treat my heir, Harry Potter, and his friends with respect, as he is presently your future Head of House."

Draco looked furious. "And if I decide to stay a Malfoy?" he ground out, just barely polite.

"Then before I cancel the contract between the House of Black and House of Malfoy, your mother will sign the paperwork to emancipate you, making you an adult and responsible for yourself, including being fully liable for all of your actions." Draco smiled. "And I do mean all of your actions. You become fully liable for all legal and financial obligations for the House of Malfoy."

When Sirius stopped talking, Draco said, "I'll stay a Malfoy. My father's house will be great again."

Sirius started to laugh. Narcissa could not help herself and she started to chuckle too.

"What? What are you laughing at? I demand that you tell me," Draco ordered them, which caused more chuckling.

"Narcissa," Sirius started when his chuckling settled, "perhaps you should explain the present condition of the House of Malfoy. As much as I dislike Lucius, I really do hate to take advantage of your son so easily. It spoils the game."

Draco looked offended, but she ignored his look. Perhaps his choice was for the best, since he had never paid attention to the lessons she had tried to teach him.

"Draco, because of all of the fines we were forced to pay because of your father's foolish actions, the Malfoy family vault has about 100 Galleons in it at the moment and all the properties and business that we owned have been sold. Other than our manor house, which has its taxes paid until the end of this year, we have no other assests or money." That was not quite true as she had siphoned nearly 50,000 Galleons off into a private account to sustain her in an emergency,

but he did not need to know that. "We also have no income, and so we will not be able to pay the taxes next year. I can't even pay for your school next term."

The Malfoy heir sat completely still, stunned at the news.

Sirius spoke next. "Whatever you do is your choice, but my advice would be to store off any family heirlooms into the family vault, and then sell the Manor house, as only a Malfoy by blood can sell it." Draco's eyes went large. "That would relieve you of the burden of paying those taxes and give you enough cash to complete school and to live for a few years or so while you find a job."

"Sell the family manor house?" he asked incredulously. He thought about that for a moment before a smile came over his face. "But I would have all the money from that," he said as if talking to himself out loud.

He would get Sickles on the Galleon, Narcissa knew, but that would not be her problem if he chose not to follow her. Sirius did not mention anything more about selling the house either.

"If I may give you one other piece of advice?" Sirius calmly queried.

Draco looked like he was about to tell Sirius off, but he relented at the last second and said, "You may."

With a smirk, Sirius slowly leaned forward and said, "I would advise you to immediately put in a request to transfer to Durmstrang, so you can attend when their school year starts in a few weeks."

Draco looked confused. "Why?"

Sirius's smirk became almost predatory. "Because, part of being on your own means that you have no patron to protect you, no father to back you up. So if you do something stupid, like try to bully another student who does have a protector, you may find yourself arrested and in front of the Wizengamot with no one to help you, at least if you're lucky. If you're unlucky, well, magic is very useful for making people just disappear -- permanently."

It was all Narcissa could do to keep her mask on as the look of horror dawned on her son's face when the meaning of Sirius's warning became clear. She loved her son because he was her blood, but she hated what he had become under Lucius's tutelage.

Sirius picked up another biscuit and nibbled at it while he watched Draco process that. "So Master Malfoy, what is your decision?"

Draco sat there for a few minutes fidgeting, mostly looking at his cold cup of tea. Finally, he looked up and said, "I think I'll be a Malfoy, but I'll transfer to Durmstrang." He looked at his mother. "Would you help me with selling the house, or at least putting it up for sale, so I only need to look at the offers?"

"Of course, Draco. It will take a few days for the paperwork to be filled out and approved. If you have any questions on the offers, I'll even be happy to advise you," she said. Assuming he was respectful to her, she added to herself.

"Thank you, Mother. I'll write a letter to Durmstrang now. Winny?" he snapped his fingers, but the elf did not come. "Where is that blasted elf?" he complained.

"I believe you'll need to do that yourself, Draco. I had to sell Winny." Narcissa did not say why, and as she expected, Draco did not ask. Instead, he grumbled and left the room, not even saying good-bye to their guest.

After her son left, Sirius let out a howl of laughter. She smiled slightly, raised one perfectly manicured eyebrow, and asked, "What?"

"He'll be like a sheep walking into a wolf's den. I almost wish I could be there to watch." He shook his head in disgust. "I'm sorry, Narcissa. I know he's your son in blood, but he's completely Lucius's son in spirit. I'm sure it hurts, but it's probably for the best this way."

"It does hurt, but I will keep in touch with him. Hopefully, he'll more readily accept my advice after some time on his own. Perhaps he will allow me a mother-like relationship with him one day." After a sigh,

she looked at her new Head of House. "A request, if I may?" He nodded. "Please do not tell your godson or his friends of this until they leave for school. I do not believe they would do anything to my son, but I would prefer not to tempt them, no matter how much I'm sure my son deserves anything they might do to him. I've heard the reports."

"They would only rejoice, but it shall be as you ask." Sirius gracefully rose. "I shall return next Wednesday and we can all go down to the Ministry and sign the papers." He gave a small bow to end the meeting and turned to go.

Narcissa showed him out before starting to wander around the house. It would not hurt to be sure there was nothing left that she desired to take. Perhaps a few of the photos of her and Draco, she considered as she started her tour.

((A/N: Well, that withheld secret did not bite Ginny as hard as it could have, but she's not -- and won't be -- happy with the results for a short while. As for Draco, he won't be seen at Hogwarts any more and he may be in for a rude awakening about life come September. :-
)

A note on titles here... Sirius uses the title of "Lord Black" when dealing with family matters because he is the head of his house. It's a way to distinguish between all the potential "Mr Blacks" (if the family was larger). He was not granted a title by the Queen, it's purely a family title and normally only used in a formal setting. Draco is addressed as "Master Malfoy" because Master is the proper title for a young gentleman in a formal setting. If it had not been a formal setting, Sirius would have called him Draco.))

Chapter 14 - Dealing with Changes

The last few weeks before school kept Ginny guessing as to what was going on with Harry. By nearly a week after their talk on her birthday, she decided this ... distancing ... was probably going to be the norm for a while. Harry was still being friendly to her, he would talk with her, he would fly with her, but she was no longer invited with him to visit Sirius on Saturdays nor did he tease her anymore. In many ways, Harry treated her just like he did Hermione. The sad part, when she finally thought about it, was that she would have been utterly thrilled to have had a relationship like this at this point in the old timeline. The thought that she could have had more but did not because of her own mistake hurt the worst. All she could really do was to enjoy the friendship she did have and hope things changed for the better.

Ginny found it interesting that they did not go shopping for school supplies in mid-August, as they normally had done in past years. Harry had all of his things, since he went to Diagon Alley every Saturday with Sirius, but her parents had not taken her and her brothers yet. When she asked her mother about it, her mother said they would be going to Diagon Alley on the morning of the thirty-first, shop, spend the night at the Leaky Cauldron, then leave from there to King's Cross the next morning. When Ginny asked why, the answer was that she and her father had thought it would nice to do something different -- sort of like a mini-holiday. Ginny found it amusing how they ended up doing the same thing as in the other timeline, but for a different reason.

On the thirty-first, they took the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and had a nice time. Sirius joined them, since he was still living at the pub and inn. Although they were tired from walking and shopping all day, it had been a pleasant time.

The only real excitement came when Ginny had to sneak away for a few minutes. While everyone was split up in different shops, Ginny took a couple of minutes to stop by the Diagon Alley Post Office. For a few Sickles, she mailed a letter she had worked hard on the night before. To the best of her knowledge, this really was the last task in

dealing with Voldemort. From here on, she could be normal, or as normal as she would ever be.

The next morning, it was the first of September and the day to return to school. Since they all had packed their trunks to come to the Leaky Cauldron, there was no mad scramble to get everything together. They would only have a short taxi drive from the Leaky Cauldron to King's Cross. Ginny thought they should do this every year.

As her family, Harry, and Sirius were all eating breakfast together in a private room, Sirius cleared his throat -- loudly. Everyone looked at him. "I have a family announcement, if I may."

Ginny noticed that even Harry looked curious, so she wondered what Sirius knew that he had not even told his godson.

"As you all know, Harry is my godson and my present heir, at least until I find a more natural means to create one." He grinned at everyone. Her mother gave him a small glare while everyone else either chuckled or at least grinned back. "I've also started taking steps to return the House of Black to its former glory, both the physical house and its family members. While I didn't cause it, I am happy to remind everyone that our biggest embarrassment, my Cousin Bellatrix, has departed from this life."

"Sirius!"

As calm as ever, the man turned to her mother. "Molly. I'm sure you see that as a lack of decorum, but considering what my cousin had done in her life, it is to everyone's benefit that she is now gone."

"Still..."

Ginny watched her father reach over and put his hand on her mother's arm. "Molly, he is the head of his house." Her mother pursed her lips in an unhappy expression, but did stop arguing.

Sirius nodded his thanks to her father. "On to happier news: I've reinstated Cousin Andromeda and her daughter into the family." Her mother looked happy about that. "And," his voice became almost

mischievous, "Cousin Narcissa decided to end her marriage for breach of contract and has returned to the family. She will now be Narcissa Black, until she finds someone else with whom to join."

Expressions of shock were on everyone's face, Ginny's included. "Why?" It was not until people started looking at her that Ginny realized she had spoken her thought.

"Why?" Sirius echoed. "Because she was basically forced into the marriage by her father and Lucius was never a very good husband. She's actually quite happy to be rid of the Malfoy name. I'm sure she'll find someone in time."

"What about her son?" her mother asked. "You didn't mention him as you did Andromeda's daughter."

"No I didn't, did I?" Sirius grin seemed to grow, although Ginny was not sure how that was possible, and he looked at Harry. "Draco has decided to not only keep the Malfoy name, but he's decided that it would be best for him to attend Durmstrang for the rest of his education."

Harry looked very surprised. "You mean?"

"Yes, you won't have to worry about him bothering you in school any more."

"Yes!"

Everyone looked at Ron. "What? Harry was thinking it too." They all laughed, including Ron. Harry gave his friend a high-five.

"Therefore, I want you have a good year, Harry. I'll be at all of your games, which you had better win." Sirius looked at his godson proudly and Harry leapt out of his seat to give the man a hug.

Ginny was really happy for Harry. She was happy for everyone there would be no Draco around, but she was happiest for Harry.

As they arrived on Platform 9 ¾, Ginny received a vivid reminder on some of the changes that had happened over the summer. The six students had already said goodbye to her parents and Sirius, and they were almost to the train when it seemed like everyone started staring at Harry.

Harry slowed his walking, saying “Hi!” to those who called out to him, but he was starting to look more and more paranoid. Finally, he turned to her and asked, “Ginny, is there dirt or something on my face? Everyone’s staring at me.”

Before she could answer, not that she had a good answer, Lavender came up to them. Her roommate Lavender, who looked a lot more thirteen than Ginny did.

“Hi, Harry!” she said excitedly. “I love your new look. I know we all think of glasses when we think of you, but I think no glasses works better for you. I’ve always like your green eyes.” She ended on a big smile that had Harry blushing.

Ginny was surprised the girl did not bat her eyes at him. Lavendar’s comment caused Ginny to recall her thoughts from when Harry had bought his contacts: every girl in Hogwarts would be enjoying his eyes.

Parvati came up next her friend. “Hello, Harry.” She looked him up and down with a smile on her face. “You’re looking nice today. Did you have a good summer?”

“Err, yeah, yeah I did.” Harry looked at them, but he was also glancing around, as if trying to figure out where to run to.

Ginny decided to save him. “Harry, we should board the train and find a compartment. It’ll be leaving soon.”

“Right, right,” he quickly said to her. Turning back to her roommates, he said, “We gotta get on board. I’ll see you later, all right?”

“Sure, Harry.”

"Later, Harry." They both giggled slightly as they boarded, their trunks already on the train as they were empty handed.

"That was strange," Ron said as he turned and boarded.

Harry grabbed her trunk and handed it to Ron to put on board and then he boarded too. Ginny smiled at his thoughtfulness and walked on, grabbing her lightened trunk pulling it behind her. "Thanks for the help, Harry," she said.

"Yeah, no problem," he told her over his shoulder as they looked for a place to sit.

A few minutes later, Ron smiled and opened a door. They found Neville and Hermione talking in the compartment.

"Harry?" Neville sounded very surprised.

"Harry!" Hermione shot up grabbed him in a tight hug, which he easily returned, although he did blush a little. She looked him up and down before she said, "You look really good. You've been taking care of yourself, haven't you? I love your contacts too; they bring out the best part of your eyes. You're not thin like you usually are and you look very happy. So what did you do this summer? Did you enjoy your time with Sirius? What's he like?"

She sat down on a bench and Harry sat beside her before he started to chuckle.

"What?" She looked around and everyone else was looking at her with grins on their faces. "What?" she asked again.

"If you want me to answer questions, Hermione, you have to give me time to answer. I'm aware of at least three questions, but I think there were more."

She blushed and looked down. "Sorry, but I'm just excited to see you, all of you. Being home was great, but I'm glad to be back at school too."

"I know," Harry told her as Neville, Ron, and Ginny took the other bench. Harry launched into the story of his summer for Hermione and Neville.

He told a lot about Sirius, although his adventures with the Horcruxes were never mentioned. Ginny was glad for that. She considered it their secret, especially as it would have called other secrets into question, the biggest of which was about her time traveling. The story of Draco being gone was applauded by both Neville and Hermione.

Ginny noticed that even after the summer stories were finished, Harry continued to talk primarily to Hermione. He did not ignore anyone else, but he seemed more focused on his bushy-haired friend, or so it seemed to her.

They were over halfway to school when a look of intense scrutiny came over Hermione. She slowly reached up and brushed Harry's hair from his forehead. A second later, she gasped. "Your scar..."

Harry calmly brushed his hair back over his scar. Ginny wondered what he would say. She had asked him in an attempt to prep him for this question from both Hermione and eventually Dumbledore, but he had never given a clear answer before. Even to her mother, who had taken three days to see the difference, he had not given any kind of substantive answer. Ginny was very impressed that Harry had withstood her mother's pressure to find out. Of course, him saying that Sirius wanted him to keep it quiet for as long as possible helped him.

When he said nothing for a long moment, Hermione asked, "What happened? It's almost gone."

He looked down and shrugged. "I can't really say, as I don't really know much about my scar. One day it was like it used to be, then I had this incredible pain in my scar. The next morning, I saw that it had changed."

Ginny almost applauded. There was not a bit of lie in the explanation at all, despite how much of the story was left out.

"But you must know more!" Hermione blurted. "This must mean something important. What did Dumbledore say when you told him?"

Harry smiled. "I haven't told him. He'll see it eventually, I'm sure."

"Harry Potter! I can't believe you didn't tell the Headmaster immediately. He could help you figure it out."

He looked at her and without a bit of emotion asked, "This would be the same Headmaster who, when I last asked a question like this, told me that I was too young to know -- even though it was about me?"

"But, but," Hermione spluttered.

"Or the Headmaster who placed me with the Dursleys, knew I would be neglected there, and forced me to return there each summer?"

Hermione now just gaped.

"Or maybe it's the Headmaster who knew about my family and my family vault, but thought I didn't need to know about such things, and that I didn't need to know anything about the Wizarding World before I went to Hogwarts?"

"I, I never knew..."

Harry shrugged as if it was a matter of indifference. "That's OK, I didn't know either until just recently. He wouldn't want you to know about his mistakes because it might ruin his image of the greatest wizard of the age," he growled bitterly.

"Oh Harry." She threw her arms around him and gave him a long hug. "Everyone makes mistakes. You need to forgive him, as I'm sure he meant well."

He snorted. "Sure, it's all for the greater good, which doesn't seem to include my good."

When Hermione released him, Neville and Ron each put a hand on his shoulder and patted it. "We're here for you," Neville told him and Ron echoed him.

"Thanks, guys."

Ginny gave him a light squeeze on the knee. He gave her a very thankful-looking smile, which warmed her heart.

While the Hogwarts Express steamed across England towards Scotland, Amelia Bones was handed a special looking envelope from her secretary. Her eyes narrowed as she glared at it. She was not sure if she wanted to open it or not, after what happened when she had received the last letter in this style of envelope. That letter had caused her to lose three prisoners -- permanently. She was not so trusting of this person now.

Deciding she could ignore the contents of this letter if it seemed advisable, she opened it, put on her monocle, and began to read.

Dear Minister Bones,

This is a very hard letter for me to write. As I'm sure you're very displeased with me, I shall start off with an apology:

I'm very sorry for enticing you to play a role in a recent sequence of actions that you probably now regret. However, please understand that I needed access to the Lestranges for a short period of time and could think of no better way to accomplish that.

To explain why that was required, as well as why this will be my last letter to you, please allow me to share some historical facts with you that are known by very few individuals.

Tom Riddle, a Slytherin who finished Hogwarts in 1945 and who adopted the nom de guerre "Voldemort", was obsessed with avoiding death. His obsession led him to perform a number of Dark rituals in pursuit of his goal. By the the thirty-first of October in 1981, he had made sufficient progress toward that goal that he did not completely die as a result of the events that he precipitated. Yes, that's correct:

despite appearances to the contrary, Riddle did not really die the night he killed James and Lily Potter and tried to kill young Harry Potter, too. Instead, he only lost his body, existing as a wraith when he was not possessing animals or some weak-willed person.

You can verify that information with Albus Dumbledore, who believed the above to be true and who was also aware of Riddle's existence when the wraith possessed Professor Quirrell in 1991. I'm sure you're asking if I mean that Dumbledore knew Riddle was in the school and possessing one of his teachers for the entire school year. To be honest, I don't know if he did or not, as I did not find out about this incident until after Quirrell died and Riddle fled the school in June of 1992.

Back to the purpose of this letter and the previous letter: I have uncovered the rituals that Riddle undertook to prevent his death and undone them. However, there was one I was unable to complete because the Lestranges still lived. As they all had multiple life sentences to keep them in Azkaban and should not have left alive, I just hastened their inevitable ends and saved the government's tax money that would otherwise have been spent keeping them alive only to die later. Their death allowed me to finally complete the undoing of the sole remaining Dark ritual that was holding Riddle to this earth.

I'm sure you're asking yourself why you should believe me about this; in your position I'd be wary as well. However, there is a simple way of verifying. Check your records for the Death Eaters who are still alive in Azkaban. Please note what their left forearm looked like when they entered prison. Now send someone to Azkaban to check the same forearm now. If my mission is accomplished, there will be an obvious difference and if that difference is present, you can rest assured that Riddle will never return -- in any form.

It is possible that he was possessing someone when I destroyed his last link holding him to this earth. If so, he will not be dead yet, and there will be no change to the Death Eaters' forearms for the moment. But as soon as Riddle leaves whoever he is possessing, he will die and the Death Eaters' forearms will change. So you'll want to check on them periodically in that case.

What you do with this information is up to you. You can either let the thought that he died in 1981 continue, or you can say that you've found a remnant of him and killed it; I don't care either way.

In case you're wondering: to the best of my knowledge, you have captured all known Death Eaters, although Voldemort sympathizers are still around. I leave them and any future Dark Wizards to you. The previous unbalance of evil has been corrected. My destiny is complete. I have seen justice served.

A concerned citizen...

Amelia laid the letter down and contemplated it -- carefully. Assuming everything it said was true, the letter had confirmed a fear of hers from years ago, and it also gave her some hope. But could she trust this person one last time? She thought about it for a few moments before she folded the letter, put it in her pocket, and left her office. She told her secretary she would be out for a couple of hours and headed for the DMLE.

Back in her old office, she found her replacement. "Kingsley? Get a squad and come with me. We're going to Azkaban for an inspection."

"What? Why?" he looked very surprised.

"Do you have anything to be concerned about?" she asked innocently.

"No, it's all secure. Everything's fine." He sounded slightly nervous.

She almost smiled at the fun she was having, but years of being an Auror allowed her to keep her stern look. "Then let's go see."

Ten minutes later, she, Shacklebolt, and four other Aurors were at the dock to take the boat that would only work for Ministry employees ... or at least that was how it was supposed to work. As they started the twenty minute ride, she pulled out the letter and handed it to him, watching him as he read it.

He handed it back with a very thoughtful look on his face. "Do you believe this one?"

"That is the important question. I suppose it doesn't really matter, as we're not being asked to do anything other than go look at a few prisoners. What's your opinion?"

Kingsley Shacklebolt took a moment before he answered. "I've heard Dumbledore say that he expected Voldemort to come back one day, so I can corroborate that part." He looked her in the eye. "It's referring to the Dark Mark, isn't it?"

She nodded. "I saw the photos of Lucius Malfoy's arm. His Dark Mark was a light gray. I can still remember some of the ones we captured before Halloween of 1981. Those Death Eaters' Mark was so dark it was black. I'm assuming that the lighter Mark indicated his existence without a body and that if the Mark is totally gone, then he's really dead."

It was his turn to nod. "That was the inference, but the letter did not really say, did it?"

"No, but it was plain enough. I suppose the real question is what we do with the information if it's true."

Shacklebolt smiled. "I'm glad it's not me who has to decide."

She snorted. "Coward," but it was said in jest. "I'm very tempted to let everyone continue to think that he died in 1981. I don't want to give anyone else any ideas that there are ways to cheat death, even if only for ten years."

He nodded. "We're almost there." He pointed to the island prison that was just becoming visible.

Fifteen minutes later, they were standing in the maximum security area. Shacklebolt stunned Lucius Malfoy, just to be safe, before they entered his cell and pulled up his left sleeve. His forearm was completely normal looking.

"I think I want to see them all," Bones said. Shacklebolt nodded his agreement and they went to the next cell to repeat the procedure.

Twenty-one cells later, they had seen twenty-two forearms without the slightest hint of Dark Magic, even when they had tried several revealing spells.

A very hopeful and very pleased Amelia Bones returned to the Ministry. It was a shame she was not going to share this news with anyone else, but it was for the good of her world.

At the Sorting feast and throughout the first two days of classes, Harry was asked many times about his lack of glasses. He always told them a simple, "I got contacts." No one asked about his scar until the third day of school. During dinner, McGonagall came over and asked him to go to the Headmaster's office after dinner. His three friends watched him walk away after they had finished eating, each wondering why the Headmaster wanted to speak with him. Only Harry and Ginny had a good idea why.

Harry returned to the common room nearly forty-five minutes later. He joined the other three at a work table after he retrieved his book bag.

"What happened?" Hermione asked.

"Not much." Harry did not seem too concerned, although he seemed to have a slight edge to his expressions. "He just asked me about my summer and if anyone unusual had taken any interest in me as I was walking around with Sirius. I told him no. Then he asked me about my scar."

"What did you tell him," Hermione quickly asked; her curiosity being very apparent, wanting more information than she had received on the train.

"Only what I told you." Harry dug for a book in his bag, still not concerned about the topic.

Ginny noticed that Ron was paying attention, but did not seem too concerned. Only Hermione showed any real interest.

Hermione was not done with the matter. “Did he tell you anything useful? You know, like what it could mean or anything else about your scar?”

Harry shook his head as he pulled out some parchment, ink, and a quill. “No, I asked him several times about it and never got any useful answer.” He now looked at her. “He didn’t even have an answer as to why I have a scar when the Killing Curse is known not to leave scars.” He was frowning now, and Ginny understood, giving him a nod to say she had received his message.

“Well,” Hermione paused for a moment, “he can’t know everything.”

Harry looked Hermione right in the eyes and said, “What I’m trying to say is that I can tell that he knows the answer but he won’t tell me, not even when I called him on it. All he says is that it’s for the best that the answer wait.”

“You should trust him, Harry. He’s very wise.” There was a little doubt in Hermione’s voice, but it had not stopped her from saying it.

Ginny watched Harry look at her very intently and she suddenly realized what he was doing. He was using a form of Legilimency to determine if she was telling the truth. It was the first time she had seen this Harry do it; her Harry had been able to do so with ease, but that was when he was nineteen. He had never become a full-fledged Legilimens, but he could easily detect truth and falsehood. Here was another example of Harry developing a skill earlier in this timeline. She wondered why that was.

She also saw something in Harry’s demeanor subtly change; she decided it was his posture. Despite the fact that he had spent a lot of his extra time this week around Hermione, he seemed to lean away from her slightly. Ginny wondered about that too.

A little coolly, Harry said, “I think we’ll have to disagree on that. He’s very intelligent, but I doubt his wisdom in things concerning me.”

“But...”

“Don’t you remember our conversation about this on the train?” Harry innocently asked, causing Hermione to instantly close her mouth. With a smirk, Harry opened his Arithmancy book. The discussion over, everyone went back to their revising.

Ginny was pleased that Harry was working harder on his schoolwork. He would never be a Hermione, for which she was quite glad, but he was applying himself more, which she was happy to encourage. The same could not be said for her brother, who occasionally complained to Harry about studying so much. In fact, her brother started up again a few minutes later as he finished an essay with a flourish.

“There,” Ron exclaimed, “I’m finished with that Transfiguration essay. Hey Harry, you want to play a game of chess?”

Harry did not even glance up. “I can in a few minutes. I need to finish these Arithmancy exercises first. Perhaps you should work on your History essay while you wait?”

Ron snorted. “Bah, it’s just an essay for Binns, and it’s not even due for another week.”

Ginny resisted rolling her eyes at her brother, although she did chuckle quietly at the glare Hermione sent him. Harry kept on working for another ten minutes. Ron doodled while he waited.

When Harry finished his work, he put his things in his bag. “Let’s go put our stuff up and get your board,” he suggested. “We can play at that other table so we don’t disturb the girls.” Ron shrugged and the two left.

“I don’t know how he passes all of his classes,” Hermione muttered.

“That’s easy, we help him. If all three of us stopped, he’d have to work a lot harder.”

Hermione stopped working and looked very thoughtful for a moment. “Perhaps we should do that; it might be for his own good. I know I don’t have much extra time this year.”

Ginny considered Ron and his work, as she also thought about a few other things concerning Hermione. She wondered what she could say. "We could still help him, but not as much. You know, sort of wean him off of our help. Of course, Ron might seek help elsewhere."

"We can't help that, but lessening our help as a crutch for him is a good idea." Hermione looked at her carefully. "Would you talk to Harry about it? I think he would be more willing to discuss it with you."

"Me?" Ginny was surprised. "He's spent a lot more time around you this week than he has me."

"That may be true," Hermione agreed, "but you saw how he just reacted to me. At least he doesn't fight with me like Ron does."

Ginny thought this was the perfect opportunity to keep her promise to old Hermione.

"Hermione, how do you see Ron?" she whispered to her friend.

The brunette blushed slightly. "He's a friend. What about him?"

"I'm just trying to see if you've changed your mind about him. I really do think Ron is really nothing more than a normal friend for you. You'd be wasting your time dating him." She watched her friend redden even more, much like she had in their conversation about Ron a few months ago. "You two are from different worlds. He doesn't understand your childhood world and he doesn't think anything like you."

Hermione was silent for a long moment.

The boys came back down during this lull and sat at a table about ten feet away. They were oblivious to the conversation about them as they started their game.

"But there's just something about him that I find intriguing," Hermione finally whispered.

Ginny shrugged and whispered back. "To each her own, but I'm telling you that fighting is not a basis for a relationship. He puts things off until the last minute and you like to do things early. That's a major personality difference that will drive both of you up the wall. Besides, he doesn't even know you're a girl, so you'll be waiting a long time for him to come around."

"So, you're suggesting that I just go about my business and not wait for him?" Hermione looked like she did not care for that idea.

"Uh-huh. If someone decent asks you out, go out with him. It could be years before he figures anything out about girls, and it could be even longer before he looks at you that way. It's just the way he is," Ginny quietly explained.

"What about," she mouthed Harry? "You don't seem to be waiting for him?" Hermione asked with a touch of teasing.

"I don't have to wait on him that way. He's a lot smarter and has already noticed me as a girl. I just have to wait on him to decide he wants to start dating. It helps that we have a good friendship to build on," Ginny calmly whispered.

"One that you helped build," Hermione pointed out.

"We have a natural attraction. You and," Ginny nodded towards her brother, "don't have that. Look, I'm not saying the two of you couldn't work out, it's just that you have so many obstacles to overcome I'm just trying to make sure you don't set your sights on him as the only boy for you and ignore everyone else. You deserve better than that." Ginny hoped that was not too strong, but she really did want the best for both Hermione and Ron, and she had to agree with old Hermione that she and Ron had not worked out so well in the other timeline.

Hermione said nothing for a moment, appearing to give the idea real thought. "Thanks, I'll think about it."

"Anytime," Ginny replied and returned to her work. If she could finish this Transfiguration essay, she would have nothing due until next Wednesday. But it was not to be for a few minutes longer.

"Hey Oliver!" she heard Harry loudly call. The burly seventh year walked over. "We need to take a break, Ron. Oliver, remember me telling you that we should have some reserve players for backup and to practice with? Well, this is one of them. Ron wants to play Keeper after you leave. You should have him do a tryout."

"Weasley," Oliver Wood held out his hand to Ron. "So you want to be a Keeper one day?"

"Yeah," Ron said almost dreamily.

Ginny almost giggled at her brother, at least until Harry stood and quickly walked her way. "And this is his sister, Ginny Weasley. She'd like to be a Chaser one day. They both received new brooms recently, too."

"Really?" Wood looked a little more interested. "What do you have?" he asked her.

She gulped her sudden nervousness down. "Uh, a Shooting Star."

"That would be a decent broom for a Chaser." Wood turned around. "What do you have?"

"A Cleansweep 5," Ron answered.

Wood nodded. "That would work for a Keeper." He turned back to Harry. "I think that's a good idea, Potter. Perhaps some tryouts are in order this year after all. It would certainly make things easier on Angelina next year." He nodded to himself absent-mindedly. "Yeah, that's really a good idea; it would make our practices more realistic." He walked off with a smile on his face as new plans were obviously being made.

"Thanks, Harry," Ginny told him, honestly appreciative for the chance to play and not have to wait until Angelina and Alicia left.

"Yeah, thanks, Harry," Ron told him too, with a lot of gratitude in his expression.

“Sure, no problem, but don’t count your dragons before they hatch either. You still have to get picked at tryouts,” he said with a wide grin. “You’re on your own for that.” Ron turned green and Harry laughed. “Shall we finish our game?” Harry asked innocently.

Ron numbly nodded and they resumed playing. Ron also lost his first chess game to Harry.

It was with great mirth that both Hermione and Ginny watched Harry do a small victory dance to celebrate his first win over Ron.

The next day they had potions for the first time this year. Harry partnered with Ron for the class and thanks to Harry being careful, their potion came out almost perfect. Professor Snape continued to act as he had for the last half of last year. He still walked around the class during the lab portion, but he no longer hovered and he also gave tips and warnings. Snape would never be a great teacher, but he was now a reasonable teacher.

As class ended, Ginny pointedly looked at Harry and then glanced at Snape. He looked a little scared but nodded. She wanted to be there with him, but they had decided just before returning to school that it might look suspicious if she was there when he talked to Snape.

Just before Ginny walked outside with everyone else, she heard Harry tell Ron to go ahead to lunch, that he had a question for Snape. Ron looked at him strangely but left with her. Hermione looked curious but she left as well. Once outside in the hallway, Ginny stopped to wait for her friend and to her chagrin, Ron and Hermione waited with her.

“You two can go on if you want,” Ginny told them, “I’ll wait for Harry.”

“I’ll wait too,” Ron said.

“I might as well stay also,” Hermione added. “Do you know what Harry is asking Professor Snape?”

Ginny was not sure what to say as Harry might come out and contradict her. She would have to be vague. "Not really. I just know that he had a question for Snape."

Ron accepted that, but Hermione looked at her a little more intently. Ginny did her best to remain as she was and hopefully remain above suspicion.

Harry came out a few minutes later. He might have had a smile on his face, but Ginny was not sure as he looked very surprised to see all of his friends waiting on him. "What?"

"That was our question, Harry," Hermione said. "What did you need to see Professor Snape for?"

He looked a bit embarrassed and it was obvious to Ginny he was about to lie. "I, uh, I had a personal question for him."

"For Snape?" Ron almost squeaked he was so surprised.

Harry nodded his head and started walking for the Great Hall. "Yes. I'm sure this will surprise you," Harry said somewhat sarcastically, "but he and I do have a few things in common."

"Like what?" Hermione asked, her quest for information was still in full force.

"We have worked together for business," Harry said vaguely. When Hermione opened her mouth to ask something else, Harry stopped her. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but it's personal."

The brunette closed her mouth. She did not look happy that he was not sharing, but she did not say anything else.

Ginny continued to watch him closely hoping for a sign, but she was denied as well -- at least during their walk. She made sure she sat next to Harry in the Great Hall.

As they ate lunch, Ginny nudged him with her elbow and raised one eyebrow when he looked at her. With the barest of smiles, he nodded and whispered, "It's gone."

Yes! Ginny mentally shouted. It took all of her willpower just to sit there and act like nothing special was happening. She wanted to jump up and dance. A glance at Harry showed him to be smirking at her, as if he knew what she was thinking and was being denied. The prat, she thought. If it would not cause so much trouble, she would throw her arms around him and kiss him again. Then the memory of their last talk returned and deflated her celebratory mood. Kissing Harry right now would not be the wisest thing she could do. With a small smile of her own, she nodded back to him.

Harry leaned over and whispered to her, "He promised not to mention our conversation to Dumbledore when I asked him not to; but he did tell me that he's already told Dumbledore that his Mark is gone. He also said they disagree on what it means."

Ginny nodded. That Dumbledore knew was not unexpected. She also noticed that Hermione was looking at them with a disapproving look. She loved her friend like a sister, but the girl was just too nosy sometimes. Ginny returned to her lunch with a mental shrug. She had no fear of Harry giving up their secret as he could be more stubborn than Hermione, and that was saying something. Ginny smiled to herself as she again considered the news. Voldemort was definitely gone from this world.

At the end of September, Ginny was sitting in the Gryffindor common room by the fire, reading her runes book from Percy when Harry walked in just before curfew. She watched him walk in with his book bag and sit down at a table with Hermione and Ron.

Ron was having to put a little more time in on his studies, as she, Hermione, and Harry had all stopped letting Ron copy any of their work. The three still helped Ron in other ways, but they had started making Ron do more of his own work. Surprisingly to her, Ron had not sought help from others, such as Neville, Dean, or Seamus.

Her gaze returned to Harry and she thought about him for a moment. She always enjoyed watching him and thinking about him, but his actions for the last month had been puzzling to her.

It had not taken her long to notice that after spending much of his extra time with Hermione during his first week back, the next week had been similarly spent with Parvati Patil. The week after, his free time was used to hang out with Lavender Brown. Two weeks ago, he had started spending a lot more time in the library and in the study hall, and it was with Mandy Brocklehurst in Ravenclaw. Finally, yesterday, he had switched again and now seemed to be hanging out with Su Li, also of Ravenclaw.

It appeared as if Harry was trying to spend time with, and probably trying to get to know, every girl in their year. For the life of her, Ginny could not understand why. Harry had classes with them all. Sure, he could not get to know them very well only in class, but he did know them.

Harry had also restarted the Defense study group this year, and he had also opened it to all the Ravenclaws and all the Hufflepuffs. Even in the third year, other students were starting to notice that Harry had the best grasp of Defense-related spells according to all the rumors. Therefore, all of the Ravens had joined, as did most of the Badgers, despite the vastly improved classes now taught by Professor Lupin. Ginny was a little surprised Harry had not invited any Slytherins, but perhaps he simply had not figured out who he could trust yet. She really should ask him about including a few Snakes. There were three Slytherins she knew he could trust. This study group gave Harry another way to get to know people, but she supposed the size of the group prevented much sharing on the personal level.

Ginny sighed and continued to think about Harry and his actions. An hour later, when the three friends were getting up to go to bed, Ginny still had not arrived at any good conclusions and it was driving her crazy. In fact, she had been distracted by the question for over a week, which was when she had first noticed the pattern in his actions. Perhaps it was time to try to get an answer, she thought.

“Harry?” she called out to him.

He turned and smiled at her, so she waved him over. As he walked her way, she considered that he had remained his friendly self towards her, not changing at all as he spent time with other girls, other than he had a little less time to spend with her. His friendliness had restrained her jealousy.

“Hi Ginny.” He looked at her and it was obvious he saw what was in her lap. “Do you like the book?”

“Yeah, it’s interesting. How about yours? I haven’t seen you reading it lately. Did you finish it?” She really was curious and was not just making small talk.

“I did. I think it will be useful later. What’s up?” he asked, sitting down in a chair next to hers.

There was no one real nearby, but there were others in the room. Pulling her wand out, she cast Muffliato; others could still see them, but they would not be able to overhear the conversation.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Oh? What’s so important?”

Ginny thought that easing into this would not help, so she bluntly asked, “Harry, I’ve notice that you seem to be spending your extra time with a lot of girls.” She blushed once she realized what that sounded like. “Sorry, I mean with various girls as if you were trying to spend some time with each girl on a list, not with a lot of girls at once.” When she saw a scowl come over him, she hastily added, “It’s not that I’m saying that’s bad or that I’m upset or that I even have a say in it at all, because I don’t; it’s all your choice. But the behaviour is such a contrast to what I had come to expect from you that I was curious why you’re doing it.” His scowl had eased when she had said it was his choice, and she found that interesting.

He looked at her intensely, as if judging her. “Why? Why do you care?”

She looked down for a moment as she considered how to answer him and not look petty. “I really am curious. If you’re looking for something

special, you know, some skill you need taught to you, if I knew, I could help you find that person faster.” That sounded kind of lame even to her own ears, but she was not really sure how to explain what she was thinking, as she was not totally sure her own thoughts and motivations in this. She only knew that she wanted to know what he was thinking; this was not like her Harry.

“I’m not searching for anything like that,” he said in a vague way.

Ginny felt like she was getting nowhere with this line of questioning. She had another thought, one that worried her slightly and it came out in her voice. “Harry ... have I not been a good enough friend?”

He looked surprised. “No ... I mean yes,” he hastily corrected himself. “You continue to be a good friend.”

That made her feel a little better. She knew he was not “dating”. A few discreet questions to others, as well as a few careful observations, had helped her figure that out.

When she said nothing more for a moment, he asked, “Why? Are you jealous?”

Ginny quickly shook her head, although she said nothing.

He stared at her again. “Are you sure?” He was not letting up and this unnerved her slightly.

“I don’t think so,” she finally said. “Or if I am, it’s not much. Maybe you’re just surprising me, so I want to know this new you better,” she finished quietly, almost as if guessing at her motivation.

Harry looked down at his hands and then interlocked his fingers. As he stared at his hands, he said, “I told you I’d always be your friend as you asked, and I am trying. It’s not hard to do as you’re fun to be around, but I need to know some things.” The mood had shifted as Harry had seemed to come to some decision.

“What?” she asked as quietly as he had become.

He still would not look at her. "Have you considered how much you have me at a disadvantage? How much you know about me? How little I know about you?"

"But we've spent a lot of time together..."

"I suppose, but you still know a lot more about me than I do about you. You seem to be able to predict my actions, at least most of the time," he said with a slight smile at the present situation, "but I can't begin to do the same about you."

"Time will fix that, Harry."

He went on as if she had not spoken. "You know me and I wonder if you know me better than I know myself."

When he had stopped talking, she prompted him. "And?"

Harry finally looked up at her. "I need to know who I am. I need to know what I like. I need to know what's right for me. I'm very appreciative of what you've done for me, Ginny, I really am; but I have to know if the path that you've set me on is the right path for me."

It was clear now. He was having an identity crisis. Well, crisis was probably too strong, but she understood his need to know who he was. She had had a similar time in her year after the diary in the other timeline. Everyone had tried to direct her and tell her how to be, especially her parents. His struggle was different, but there were enough similarities she understood and she knew that she could do nothing other than be a friend to him. This was yet another result of her changes to the timeline.

"I understand, Harry," she said as she slowly nodded. "I had a time like that in the other timeline." This next part hurt, but it was the right thing to do. "If you need someone to talk to about it, I'm available; otherwise, I hope your search goes quickly."

He looked surprised as he smiled. "Thanks, Ginny. This is one of the reasons why you're my friend." He reached over covered her hand on the arm of her chair for a brief moment before he stood.

"Can I ask you one other thing I'm curious about?"

He looked at her and shrugged. "I guess..."

"I haven't seen you and Professor Lupin talking. Has he not tried to contact you and, well, get to know you?" There were a number of things about Lupin that had always mystified her, but she had not known him well enough in the other timeline to find out the answers to her questions.

"No, not really. I asked Sirius about it and he said that he and Lupin were still coming to new terms with their friendship and that he had asked Lupin to hold off talking to me until they worked things out." Harry did not seem pleased or displeased, just sort of resigned.

"And you're OK with that?" she asked, genuinely curious.

Harry shrugged. "I'm a little mixed on it. I'd like to get to know more about my parents, and yet, Sirius has a good point that Lupin disappeared from my life for twelve years with no real excuse for doing so. He wasn't in prison and could have dropped by to see me as an uncle or something. The biases against him in this world don't exist in the Muggle world, so Sirius thinks he should have kept in contact with me." Harry picked his bag up. "I'll get to know him eventually, but I can wait a month or three for them to work things out."

Ginny was surprised by the answer and his non-caring. Then again, as she thought back to the other timeline, Sirius was the more important of the two, and Lupin did not really become a factor in Harry's life until his fifth year, two years after Lupin reappeared. With a nod, she said, "OK, thanks," as she took the privacy charm down.

He gave her a small smile and said, "Good-night."

She ignored the situation with Lupin and wondered how long it would take for Harry to answer his questions about himself and what their relationship would be like at the end. At least they were still good friends and they spent a lot of time together. As she considered it, she realized she was actually pretty happy with the way things were, except for him spending his extra time with the other girls. Originally, she had not expected any sort of dating until fourth year anyway.

Ginny also recognized that the way she thought about Harry was slowly changing too. Her feelings for him were not quite as idealistic as when she had first come back in time. She wondered if coming back in time and merging her eleven year-old thoughts with her older "normal" thoughts had de-aged her somewhat, at least emotionally. Perhaps she was more emotionally like a twelve year-old, while she was intellectually her older self. That might explain why she did not feel as much like a pervert for wanting to be with Harry as she had when she had first come back. Of course, he was getting older, which helped. But she was sure something had changed within her.

Without anyone else to really talk to, other than Harry (who was part of the problem) and Sirius (who would know less about this than she did), she was just going to have to be patient and work through this. She mentally groaned as she realized she was going to have to be an emotional teenager -- again!

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny found a compartment on the Hogwarts Express. It was a week before Christmas and they were all heading home for the holiday break. Hermione grabbed a book out of her bag and immediately started reading.

Ginny watched Harry put his bag on the overhead rack before he said, "I'll be back later. I'm going to go sit with Tracey and Daphne for a while."

Ron snorted. "I still don't understand what you see in them, Harry. They're Slytherins."

Harry shook his head slightly. "Like the last time you argued with me, I'll tell you that they're actually nice and are fun to talk to, just like everyone else. They aren't like Pansy, who's on an ego trip, or

Millicent, who so stand-offish she doesn't really have any friends. The only difference between them and, say, Hermione and Ginny, are that they are in a difference house and approach situations a little differently."

"I still think you're barmy," Ron said somewhat sullenly.

"That's all right," Harry said with an easy grin, "I still think you're too close-minded." With what appeared to be a wink at her, or so Ginny thought despite not being sure he really had done that, Harry left.

"Bah," Ron growled.

Neville grinned, holding back a chuckle, while Hermione just shook her head.

"He has a point," Ginny told her brother. "The fact that you won't even consider the idea that a Slytherin could be a reasonable person is close-minded."

Ron mulled that over for a minute. He finally came out of his thoughts and looked at her. "I don't see you spending time with the Slytherins, so aren't you in the same boat?"

Ginny saw Hermione grimace slightly at Ron's attempt to make himself not look so bad. "Actually, Ron, I have partnered with Tracey and Daphne in Herbology class, and I've also spoken with them several times in the library. I may not be best friends with them, but we know each other and are friendly."

Ron did not look pleased that his attempt to save face had failed.

"If you want to talk to someone decent in Slytherin, try making friends with Blaise Zabini," Ginny told him. "He's considered neutral and is the best of the bunch. I would agree that the rest of the third year boys aren't worth the effort."

Ron shook his head and looked at his roommate. "Neville, let's go find Dean and Seamus. I bet they'll have a more reasonable outlook on life."

Neville shrugged but stood up with Ron. "I guess we'll be back later," he shyly said, as he followed her brother out the door. Ginny gave him a smile and a nod, understanding the need for male solidarity at times.

When the door closed, Hermione looked up from her book. "Perhaps you shouldn't be so hard on him, Ginny. Ron is starting to grow up."

Ginny gave a sigh. "I know, he is doing better. He's starting to do more and more of his own work, and he's finally learning to balance school work and Quidditch practice, unlike when we both started playing on the reserve team."

Hermione smirked. "It was pretty funny how overboard he went."

Ginny made a fake gagging sound. "You didn't have to listen to him as much as I did. I swear, that's all he would talk about the first week after Wood let him have a tryout and start attending practices."

"You have a point," Hermione agreed. She looked at Ginny and it looked like she was thinking deeply, so Ginny kept quiet. "I think you have a good point about me waiting on Ron," Hermione softly said. "He's growing up and becoming a nicer friend to be around, but it will be a long wait until he's the sort of person with whom I want to spend a lot of one-on-one time."

"I'm impressed," Ginny seriously told her friend. "I thought you'd be a lot harder to convince."

Hermione looked out the window for a moment. "There are things about him that I like, but there's a big difference between watching and waiting. You're right that I shouldn't wait for him, but I will watch to see if he becomes someone I want to date one day."

"And if someone good comes along in the meantime?" Ginny asked innocently.

Hermione grinned. "Then I'll enjoy the moment. Who knows? I might find someone who I'll like better than Ron."

Ginny chuckled. "That's the spirit!"

Hermione chuckled too.

Ginny wondered if this was a good time to bring something else up. She almost did not, until she again noticed the bags under her friend's eyes, bags that had been present ever since Halloween. "Hermione? May I make one more suggestion for you to consider?"

"I suppose," Hermione said tentatively, despite the closeness a moment ago.

Gathering her courage, Ginny went right for the heart of the matter. "Hermione, I'm really concerned about your health, and I think you need to give up Muggle Studies and Divination. They don't serve any purpose for you and they're only making you overly tired and putting too much strain on you."

A determined look came over the brunette. "I want to take them and there's no reason to drop them. I can handle the load."

Ginny knew she was going to have to do the hard thing. "Hermione, I know you want to learn all you can about the Wizarding world, but you can't physically handle them, at least not normally."

"Sure I can..."

"No you can't," Ginny cut her off, "not without a Time-Turner," Hermione looked shocked and scared, "and it's beyond stupid for the Professors to have loaned you one just so you can take two classes that you really won't learn anything useful in."

Hermione stared at her for a moment before she quietly asked, "How did you know?"

Ginny wanted to roll her eyes, but she refrained. "Anyone could figure it out if they only used their brain. Arithmancy is at the same time that Divination is; and yet, you're physically in both of those classes.

There is only one way for a person to be physically present in two places at once and that's with a Time-Turner."

"But, but, Professor McGonagall said they're really rare and most people don't know about them," her friend argued.

"And you're forgetting that my father works in the Ministry and I spend a lot of time in the library too," Ginny retorted. When Hermione looked down, Ginny went on. "Look, I'm not going to make you do anything and I'm not going to tell anyone either." Hermione looked up with a grateful look. "But I will say that you're burning yourself out and ruining your health for nothing as those two classes are worthless to you."

"I am learning things in there," Hermione weakly protested.

"Fine, go read how to interpret tea leaves and Tarot cards. Beyond that, there's nothing for you, or me, to learn because we don't have the magical gift of Seeing. Without the magical gift, it's a useless class."

Hermione slowly nodded. "I've come to the same conclusion, but I thought there might be more to learn later."

Ginny shook her head. "There's really not. Muggle Studies is also useless for you because you were raised Muggle. You probably already know more about the Muggle world than the professor does."

Hermione surprised her with snort. "It's sad really. The author of the text for the class apparently thinks Muggles are still in the late eighteen hundreds, and even that isn't totally accurate as they do acknowledge older cars and electricity. They ignore large standing armies and what they can do, rifles, airplanes, not to mention everything to do with electronics." She gave a sigh. "I tried to tell the professor that Muggles had even used a spaceship to travel to the moon and had walked on it, and I lost twenty points for trying to lie to her."

"She's a Pureblood, Hermione. Professor Burbage has probably never gone out the public door of the Leaky Cauldron, but instead

uses the Floo or the public Apparation point to get to Diagon Alley. Most Purebloods are that way,” Ginny explained.

“But your family is not like that and you’re Purebloods.” Hermione looked determined to understand.

“I said most,” Ginny reminded her. “We’re one of the exceptions, but look at my dad. He’s probably the most knowledgeable about Muggles at the Ministry, and from what I hear from you and Harry, he’s also probably got a lot of things wrong.” Her old knowledge knew her dad had things wrong, but she could not say that.

“He’s really nice,” Hermione quickly pointed out, “but you’re right, he does mix a few things up.”

“So, if you know more than the expert at the Ministry, why are you taking Muggle Studies? Go talk to McGonagall about dropping those two courses and giving her back the Time-Turner. They’re really dangerous and should only be used in exceptional circumstances.” Ginny did her best to convince her friend and ignore the slight hypocrisy of her stance against time manipulation. There had been no other way for Ginny to correct the imbalance in her old world.

Hermione nodded. “Professor McGonagall lectured me extensively on it.” She sighed. “I would like more sleep and my other classes are suffering.”

With a wry grin Ginny quipped, “Just think of how many Ravenclaws will get better grades than you because your other classes are suffering.”

Hermione did not look pleased to be reminded that. “If I’m not careful, you’ll pass me up too.” She looked even less pleased, although she tried to put a small smile on her face at the end. “I’ll think about it,” she finally said before looking carefully at her redheaded friend. “Are you handing out any more free advice?”

With a light chuckle, Ginny said, “That’s it for now, but I’m sure I can think of some more if you want me to.”

“That’s all right,” Hermione said as she opened her book back up. “I’ve got plenty to think about.”

Ginny was pleased with the conversation. She had no idea if Hermione would give up the two classes, but she felt her friend had learned a valuable lesson over this last term. She turned her thoughts from her studious friend to her missing best friend.

Harry was still doing well in his school work, but he was also still working his way through all the third-year girls, making friends and spending time with them. After Christmas, she expected him to spend time with Daphne Greengrass and then start spending time with each of the four Hufflepuff girls. Knowing Harry as she did, she had the most concern about the Hufflepuffs. Many in the school thought them weak, but Ginny knew different. Their friendliness and loyalty would be very appealing to Harry. If there was competition for Harry’s attention, it would be from the Hufflepuff girls.

About halfway through the trip, Ron and Neville came back. Harry did not return until the train was slowing down to enter King’s Cross station.

“Sorry, I lost track of time,” Harry said breathlessly, as if he had run back.

While he was pulling his bag of things down from the shelf, Ginny asked him, “Harry, are you still going to come visit us during Christmas?”

Harry looked taken aback when he looked at her. “You didn’t hear? Sirius invited your family over to our house for Christmas dinner.”

Ginny was surprised and a glance at Ron showed him to be as well. “No, I hadn’t heard.”

“Oh, well, I just heard yesterday in a letter from Sirius. I guess I assumed your mum had told you as well. Anyway, Sirius and I will be there, as will Sirius’s new girlfriend, whoever she is. He hasn’t even told me her name.” He grinned. “Makes me wonder if she’s ugly or something.”

Ron and Neville joined him in a chuckle while the two girls glared.

Harry cleared his throat as if that would excuse him. "Yeah, well, besides them, Professor Lupin will be there too."

"Oh, why is that?" Hermione asked a little eagerly.

Harry paused for a second as if trying to figure out what to say. "He's an old friend of my parents and Sirius."

"I assume Lupin and Sirius worked things out?" Ginny asked. The others looked at her and she realized that she had just made it known that she knew more than they did.

"Yeah, but I don't know the details. I guess I'll find out what's going on when I get home," Harry told them.

Ginny was happy that he could use the word "home" so freely now, unlike when he had lived with the Durleys.

The train was stopped and many of the students had exited the train, so they could now walk down the aisle. "Come on," Harry called and led the way out.

Out on the platform, Ginny saw Sirius standing next to her parents and they were talking. She assumed it was about their visit. Neville and Hermione saw their parents and left. Ginny, Ron, and Harry walked over to their parents.

"Hey, kiddo!" Sirius swept Harry into a hug, who energetically returned it. "Ready to go home and decorate the house for Christmas?"

"Yeah!" Harry said with a large smile.

"That's good, because Dobby has been trying to start since the first of December. Tell your friends good-bye until next week." Sirius took Harry's bag from him and gave him a pat on the shoulder to send him forward.

Harry grabbed Ron's hand in a shake and they slapped each other on the shoulder as if trying to knock the other over. Ginny almost giggled at their antics. She almost "eeped" when Harry stepped over and gave her a quick hug, touching his cheek to hers. "See you next week," he told her family and waved.

Sirius waved as well and walked Harry over to the Apparation point for the platform before they disappeared.

"Let's go home," her father said as he waved the twins over from where they had been talking to Lee Jordan. He started herding them all towards the exit. "We're going to take a taxi to the Leaky Cauldron and then use the Floo to go the rest of the way home."

Ginny wondered what Christmas would be like as she followed her parents. This would be nothing like the Christmas of her second year in the other timeline.

((A/N: Based on my outline, it looks like there will be 3 more chapters.))

Chapter 15 - A Shift

Christmas morning, Ginny went through the motions of opening presents and interacting with her family. She was mostly happy, but the fact that she had no present from Harry disappointed her. As she thought about it, she decided that since her family was going over to Sirius's house for Christmas dinner, Harry would probably give her present to her then. That eased her mind somewhat. She did not want a present just to have a present, but she felt that what he gave her would indicate how he felt about her.

Given her mother's nervous behavior, it was easy to tell that her mind was not at ease. For the first time in many years, her mother was not cooking on Christmas Day. The state of "not cooking" translated itself into a state of "worry." Ginny found it amusing, but followed her father's lead of being careful around her mother so as not to cause any needless problems.

The rest of the family present seemed to be having a good time during the holiday. Bill and Charlie were unable to get enough time off work to make the trip back to England practical.

By lunchtime, everyone was dressed nicely and they all took the Floo to Sirius's house. It was nicer looking than last time she had seen it and impeccably decorated for Christmas. It looked like one of those model homes in Witch Weekly. Even her mother seemed to be impressed, based on her reaction.

"Weasleys... Welcome!" Sirius's voice boomed as he walked into the living room they had Floored into, instead of the kitchen. She was glad Sirius had changed that. "I'm glad you could make it. Let me introduce a few people who will also be joining us."

That was when Ginny noted a familiar man walk in behind Sirius, along with Harry and a woman she had not seen in this timeline before, although she knew her as a fierce fighter in the other timeline. A slightly older woman walked in last and stood at the back, someone Ginny was surprised to see at first, although it made sense after thinking about it. Ginny noticed her parents visibly react with

nervousness at this last woman, although it was also obvious they tried to hide it.

The younger woman stepped forward and put her hand on Sirius's arm. Sirius put his hand over hers and gave her a big smile. "Everyone, this is Hestia Jones, an Auror and friend. To answer the question on everyone's mind, I met her at the Ministry not long after I was released from prison. Hestia, I would like to introduce the Weasleys." Sirius named each of them, to which Hestia nodded and greeted them.

"You seem to be short two children, Arthur." Sirius was looking around to make sure he had not missed anyone.

"Quite right, Sirius. My two oldest, Bill and Charlie, are out of the country and unable to make it."

"Most unfortunate," Sirius replied as he stepped to the side and pulled Hestia with him. "Arthur and Molly, I believe you two are the only ones who do not know Professor Remus Lupin, an old friend of mine and of Harry's parents, as well."

Lupin stepped forward and shook Arthur and Molly's hands. "Good afternoon, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Arthur paused for a moment. "Lupin ... you're the professor for Defense Against the Dark Arts, aren't you?"

"I am," he said with the barest of smiles.

"Ah, then you can tell us how our children are doing." He smiled at the five children with him, who all looked less than pleased to be in the situation at the moment -- even Ginny, who knew she was doing very well.

Lupin chuckled. "I'll not make them suffer; rather, I'll report that each of them is doing well, even the two you would least suspect -- based on their reputation," he said with a wry grin.

Ginny watched her mother beam at the twins and she watched them shrink back with an embarrassed look. It was an amusing reversal of the usual situation where the twins were in trouble.

"I believe most you," Sirius looked at Ginny and her brothers, "haven't met my cousin, who is presently without a family. May I present Narcissa Black."

Narcissa took one step forward before giving a nod with a brief curtsy. "Happy Christmas, everyone. I'm also pleased you could join the House of Black for the festive occasion," her smooth and cultured voice spoke.

Her father cleared his throat a little nervously. It appeared that he had forgotten Sirius's announcement back in September. "Happy Christmas to you as well, Miss Black."

Ginny found the awkward moment amusing, although she was careful not to show it. On the other hand, all of her brothers, even stoic Percy, were wide-eyed at the sight of a former Malfoy in their presence. Sirius broke the awkward moment.

"Since everyone already knows Harry," Sirius indicated the last person on his side of the room, "let's go sit down to eat."

He led them all to the dining room and everyone saw an immaculately set room fit for a king. At each place was a small placard with a name on it. As everyone found their place, Ginny saw that the adults were at one end of the table, with Sirius at the head, and the children were at the other end, with Harry at the foot of the table.

As they were seated, Ginny heard her mother say, "Do you need to me to bring the food in?"

Sirius smiled. "No, don't trouble yourself, Molly." He had barely finished saying that when dishes and trays of food suddenly started appearing on the table. Ginny knew it was courtesy of Dobby's magic. "Everyone, help yourself." He started the process of selecting a platter of ham, helping himself to it and then passing it on.

The meal was quite good, Ginny thought, maybe even better than her mother's because of the variety. The quality of preparation was as good as her mother's cooking. The conversation was a bit bland, as her family was on their best behavior, threatened with a dire warning from her mother if they did not behave. The adults did not talk about anything overly interesting.

After the meal, they all went back into the living room again.

"Everyone, please take a seat," Sirius directed them. He went over to the Christmas tree and with his wand, he caused a box the size of a small footlocker to come out from under the tree and to move over in front of Arthur. "A small gift from our family to yours. Harry assures me that even though this might be used the most by your children, that you and Molly might get some use out of it, even if it's only peace and quiet," he ended on a smirk.

Her father chuckled as he pulled a small colorfully wrapped box the size of a deck of cards out of his pocket, and his wand so he could enlarge it. Everyone could see that it was obviously a painting of some sort as it returned to full-sized. "A Christmas and a house warming gift from our family to yours," he said proudly, handing the wrapped present to Sirius.

Sirius ripped the paper off to find the portrait of a wizard with dark hair and the family crest of the House of Black on his robes. The wizard was fighting a horde of goblins, and it looked like he was winning as goblins went flying, only to have more take their place.

Arthur cleared his throat a little nervously. "While not the most pleasant of subjects, I found this family heirloom a few years back in a Muggle house. It probably was handed down through a squib line, but they really should not have had a magical item like this, so I confiscated it. It wasn't until I returned to the office that I noticed the Black crest on the wizard's robes. Based on the picture, which I believe to be the last big goblin rebellion, I would guess this to be Phineas Nigellus Black's grandfather, Orion Black. I thought you should have it."

A big grin came over Sirius. "While not something to take with me to my next meeting at Gringotts," everyone gave a forced chuckle, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the family heirloom, Arthur. Your noble gesture is most appreciated." For the moment, Sirius set it on the mantle above the fireplace, leaning it against the wall and a small tapestry hanging there. He turned around and gestured towards his gift to the Weasleys.

Arthur unwrapped the present and found a small chest. Ron noticeably sucked his breath in. It was not hard for Ginny to guess what it was either. Her father opened the chest to reveal a brand new set of Quidditch balls as well as a pair of Beater Bats.

"I understand that it is a family sport at your house," Sirius said. "And please don't worry, Molly," he hastily added. "The Bludgers have a cushioning charm on them to lessen the injuries." She smiled gratefully.

"It is indeed a family sport," Arthur said with a chuckle, "although, it has been a few years since Molly and I played with the children. Perhaps it's time to return to the family game." He looked up to his host. "You and Harry would be most welcome to join us."

"Thank you, we'd be delighted." Sirius turned to Harry and nodded.

Harry practically dove to the tree and pulled out a stack of small presents, handing one to each of the Weasley children. "These are from me." Each of the children pulled out a small present which their mother expanded before they handed them to Harry.

Ginny had bought Harry a good quality dark maroon robe with the Potter crest sewn onto the breast, which he seemed to really like. He had given her a broom servicing kit, along with extra polish. It was a nice gift, but she was slightly disappointed that it was not more romantic. With force of will, she pushed her disappointment away and gave him a big smile. It was still too soon, she thought.

As they sat around and casually talked for awhile, Dobby appeared with some snacks and various drinks. Ginny grabbed two bottles of Butterbeer, handing one to Harry.

"Thanks," he told her as he opened it.

"No problem." She motioned for him to follow her and he did. She went out of the room and over to the stairs, walking most of the way up the first flight before sitting down. He sat down next to her.

"How's it going with Sirius?"

Harry grinned. "Spectacular, great even. I don't know how well he would have done when I was a baby, but he's what I need now." He gazed at her with a thankful expression before he whispered, "I really appreciate..." He stopped and pulled out his wand, casting the Muffling charm she had taught him. "I really appreciate what you did for me with the Dursleys."

"You're very welcome, Harry. I'd do it anytime." Despite her being calm and casual, he looked down as if embarrassed. She decided to relax and let him work through it.

"Ginny," he said after a long moment, "I'm really sorry I haven't been as good a friend to you as I could have been. I really should be spending more time with you and I promise that I will soon."

That was a surprise. "Oh? Why soon?"

He mumbled something she did not catch.

"What was that?" she asked.

Harry sighed, still not looking at her. "I have to finish my task for Sirius first," he quietly said, as if not wanting to admit it.

"What task is that?" she asked curiously.

He glanced at her and she saw a look like he did not want to explain, but knew he must. She was not sure why he felt compelled, but did appreciate knowing.

"Sirius said that because I won't take the obvious choice," he emphasized the last three words, "I must spend some time with all the other girls getting to know them. I drew the line at Pansy and Millicent and he agreed, knowing their families. Still, I'll be done by the end of February and then we can spend more time together -- as friends."

Ginny was feeling pretty good about what he was alluding to until he added the last two words. "I don't understand, since we're already friends."

He took a long pull on his Butterbeer. "We could get to know one another better." He paused to finish off his drink, as if he needed to figure out how to say something. "Sirius says that since I'm the last Potter, I have a family obligation to not take too long to produce an heir." He shook his head slightly as he turned red. "I tried to throw that back on him, as he's in the same situation and a lot older, and he pointed out that he's on very friendly terms with Hestia."

She was starting to figure out what was going on, despite the fact that he was mostly avoiding her question, and she wondered if she needed to talk to Sirius about not putting pressure on him. "What is she like?"

Harry shrugged but seemed relieved at the topic change. "Pretty nice from what little I've talked to her. She's five years younger than Sirius, but that probably works pretty well for him, as I don't think he fully grew up while in prison."

"I suppose that makes sense," she said. The idea of having some fun at his expense came to her. "So, what's this obvious choice you talked about?" With just a hint of teasing, she added, "What are you choosing between?" She wondered if she would be correct in her guess.

Now Harry really blushed and looked down. "I'd rather not say at the moment."

"Oh? Why not?" She struggled to keep the innocent look on her face and in her voice.

"I'm not ready to do anything, so it doesn't matter right now."

"If that's what you want." There was a slight edge to his voice, so Ginny knew she had better stop there. They were on better terms now and she wanted it to keep it that way. "Since Professor Lupin is here, shall I assume he and Sirius worked out their problem?"

Again Harry looked relieved at the subject change. "Yeah. Sirius was pretty upset that Moony," Harry paused, "he lets me call him that when we're alone. Anyway, Sirius was pretty upset that Moony abandoned me for twelve years, not even stopping by for birthdays and Christmas to act like an uncle or something. Moony said that he had wanted to, but that Dumbledore had told him not to go near me. Sirius asked him how many times they had done things Dumbledore had told them not to and asked why this was different. Moony said that Dumbledore had told him that it was the only way to keep me safe. Then Sirius told Moony what little I've told him about my life at the Dursleys." He shook his head. "Sirius made it sound like it was a pretty ugly row."

Ginny could only imagine. "And now?"

"Moony swore he'd start treating me as his own, regardless of what Dumbledore wants. We're supposed to start meeting on Sundays at school. After he apologized to me, we've started getting to know one another this last week and he's pretty nice most of the time." Harry grew pensive and looked at her as if trying to divine something.

"You're wondering if I know his secret, aren't you?"

Harry looked surprised, but nodded.

"I do, but don't worry; I won't tell anyone. However, people will figure it out eventually. It's hard to miss when he gets sick so regularly," she said sympathetically. Ginny considered the situation. "Maybe it will be different this time around and he can continue teaching. He's the best Defense teacher we've had so far. I guess we'll have to wait and see."

He nodded. "It would be good to keep him. What do you think..." Harry was interrupted by Ron walking up to the bottom of the stairs.

"There you two are, I've been looking for you, and I think Mum has too."

Harry pulled his wand out and canceled the Muffling spell, which caused Ron's eyebrows to shoot to the top of his forehead.

"You're using magic? You'll get into trouble..."

Harry chuckled and even Ginny smiled, already knowing the answer.

"Don't tell the twins, but you wouldn't, here. There are too many wards and hiding charms on the house," Harry explained.

Ron suddenly looked suspicious. "Then what spell were you just doing?"

"Just a privacy charm, my brother," Ginny said as she got up. "We didn't want anyone eavesdropping."

"And what do you talk about that's so private?" His suspicion was still in full force.

"If we told you, it wouldn't be private any more, would it?" she asked, her sarcasm clearly evident. Harry chuckled and got up as well. She looked at him and saw he was more relaxed now. Ginny was pleased. Despite the fact that he still planned to spend time with the Hufflepuff girls, she thought the situation between them was looking better.

Ginny followed Harry into a compartment on the Hogwarts Express, ready to go home at the end of their third year. She was pleased that Harry put her trunk up and then sat down next to her. They were still just friends, but they were slowly getting closer.

One fly in the potion was that Harry's two week time with Susan Bones had been good enough that he had continued spending some time with her occasionally for the rest of the year. Ginny was pleased

that Harry was not searching out the strawberry blonde Hufflepuff to sit with on the train, but she was a little saddened that her prediction that the Hufflepuff girls would be the real competition had come true.

“What is everyone doing for the summer?” Hermione asked as they all made themselves comfortable. It was the usual five Gryffindors together. “I’m going to Spain with my parents for most of July.”

Harry looked at her sharply; his attention had been focused on something outside the compartment window. “Are you going to be here on the thirty-first? It’s a Sunday.”

“I think so, why?”

He looked around at them all. “Er, I’m probably not supposed to tell you yet, so you can’t say anything, but Sirius is planning to throw me a birthday party and all of you will be invited.” He grinned and looked at her. “Ginny, you’ll get to use the party manners your mum told you about last summer.”

Ginny groaned. “Please don’t remind me.”

“What?” Ron asked, and the other two looked very interested as well.

Seeing that she could not get out of it, she told them. “Last summer, Mum talked to me how young witches were supposed to act in formal situations; you know, how to be proper and all that crap.”

“Ginny!” Hermione almost shrieked.

Ginny only laughed at Hermione taking the bait. Her friend was so predictable.

Neville groaned. “Gran is going to talk to me about that sort of thing, too, when that invitation arrives.”

“It’s not that hard,” Hermione countered. “Most of it is common sense. I’ve read several books about Wizarding customs.”

Ron snorted. “It’s not that easy, Hermione...”

"Yes it is, as long as you think before you speak," she said pointedly.

Here we go again, Ginny thought. Trying to derail the argument before it got any louder, she hurriedly asked Harry a question. "Harry? Will you be staying with Sirius from now on?" That stopped her friend and her brother from arguing.

A brief look of anger flashed across his face. "Yes, but only after lots of arguing between Sirius and Dumbledore last night."

"So that's where you were last night," she commented. "Why? I thought that after what happened at your relatives that it didn't make sense for you to go back there." Ginny wondered what Dumbledore was trying to do now.

"It doesn't, but Dumbledore still believes I'm in danger. Even though he doesn't have any more blood from my mother to reestablish the old wards there, he came up with a plan to create wards that were," he held up his hands in air quotes, "almost as good using my blood. Sirius pitched a fit and I told the Headmaster he wasn't getting any of my blood. Voldemort is dead," Ron and Neville twitched at the name, "and any remaining Death Eaters should be easily dealt with. Besides, the Black home is heavily warded for security."

"And Dumbledore thought that wasn't good enough?" Ginny was incredulous at the thought.

"Yeah, he doesn't think that's good enough. And to make it even more maddening, I can tell he knows something else but won't tell Sirius or me what it is." Harry shook his head. "Stubborn old coot."

Neville snorted and started laughing, causing everyone other than Hermione to laugh as well. "My Gran has called him that a few times."

Hermione looked like she could not believe what Harry and Neville were saying. "But he's the Headmaster..."

"Hermione," Harry stopped her with a tired voice. "How many times have we talked about his mistakes? I'm glad that you have people

you look up to and can respect, but the Headmaster is not on my list of respected people until he will explain some things to me, and he refuses to do that.”

“Maybe you don’t need to know, Harry,” she argued, much as she did with Ron.

Harry gave her a calculating look. “Very well; let’s play ‘what if’ for a moment. What if you, Hermione Granger, found out that Albus Dumbledore had information about you that determined your path in life and if you did not make the right decisions, that all of your friends and both of your parents would most likely be killed? And what if when you found out that he had that information, you asked him what it was so you could make more informed decisions about your life to keep those around you safe, he told you that it didn’t matter right now -- that he would tell you later, at some unspecified date? Tell me, Hermione, what would you think of the man who won’t tell you what you need to know to keep your loved ones alive?”

Hermione looked uncomfortable for a moment. “That’s a made-up situation, Harry. The Headmaster wouldn’t do something like that. But if he did, then I would trust him to tell me at the right time.”

He locked gazes with her. “And if he falls down the stairs and breaks his neck, killing himself before he can tell you? Or if you make a wrong decision in the meantime, getting someone killed before you can do something to help them?”

She shifted, almost squirming, in her seat in the complete silence of the compartment, with only the rumble of the train going down the tracks as a background noise. “I would still trust him,” she quietly said. “I have to.”

“Why do you have to trust him?” Harry asked just as quietly.

“Because if I can’t trust him, then I see no hope for the Wizarding World to get better.”

Harry seemed to glow just slightly as his magical power leaked, unconsciously. “You pin all of your hopes of a better world on one

man?" She nodded as if afraid to answer. "On one man who has made many mistakes in his long life, including sacrificing a young boy's childhood by putting him into a home where he knew the boy would be neglected and unloved and possibly abused? That's the man you're putting all of your hopes on to fix our society?"

Ginny wondered about the conversion Harry had had last night. It sounded like Dumbledore did not share the prophecy, but he had shared a few things -- things probably only Sirius had made him admit to. She was amazed; this sounded like her Harry.

Hermione looked and sounded like she was about to squeak. "If not him, then who else is there?"

Harry leaned back against the bench and his power dropped. "Why not all of us who believe there needs to be a change? Dumbledore is not all bad, but he doesn't have my full trust and he shouldn't have yours either. I'm starting to think he's forgotten what it's like to be a normal person. He's been Chief This and Supreme That for far too long." Harry took a deep breath, but did not release her from his gaze. "Think about it... Should any one person have that much power?" he asked her with intensity.

It was very quiet in the compartment; no one seemed to know what to say after that. Ginny decided that she was probably best able to handle him at the moment. "Harry?" His gaze slowly left Hermione and turned to her. "I need a breath of fresh air. Will you escort me please? I don't like to stand on the end of the train alone." She gave him a pleading look and he nodded. He followed her out and to the back.

Ginny stepped onto the small landing on the back of the train, holding tightly onto the railing. She was not really afraid of the place, but it was not a favorite place of hers, either. Most importantly, it offered privacy; no one would be able to join them because the landing was so small or overhear them because of the noise.

Harry closed the door after them and stood next to her, holding onto the railing as well. "I was a little intense there, wasn't I?" He looked a

little embarrassed as he looked out over the tracks the train had just traveled.

She could not help the giggle that escaped, and Harry shyly smiled back. It was enough to remove most of the seriousness. "You do know that your magic comes out when you're really passionate about something, don't you?"

"No. Was that why Hermione was suddenly so ... so intimidated?"

"Yes." She looked at him to gauge his reaction to her next question. "I assume that while Dumbledore didn't share the prophecy with you, he did share some other things?"

A flicker of anger came to him again. "He made no mention of the prophecy, but can you believe that..." he paused as if having to control himself, "that man admitted that he knew I would suffer when he left me on the Dursleys' doorstep? He knew he was, and I quote, condemning me to ten dark and difficult years, unquote, but he did it anyway and he also had the audacity to not explain why. I was so angry that I destroyed a whole shelf of his little silver instruments and Sirius wasn't much better as he banished his chair at the Headmaster, except that he didn't aim too well and it broke out the window behind the desk."

Ginny's eyes went wide and a hand flew to her mouth. "Really?" When he confirmed with a nod, she started laughing. His anger dissipated and he chuckled too, for a moment.

"It was a funny sight -- now that it's over," he sheepishly admitted, looking at her with a goofy grin. He put a hand over hers on the railing. "Thank you again for saving him. Having Sirius there to help me and to stand up for me made me understand how much I miss my parents, but," he looked out for a moment and then back at her, "it's not so bad with you and Sirius as my family."

She could not help it, she stepped over to him and gave him a hug. He hugged her back with one arm, the other still holding onto the railing. They stood there and gently swayed to the motion of the train for a long moment.

"We should probably go back," he eventually said.

"Yeah, they've probably recovered by now."

He chuckled. "Do you think I should apologize to Hermione?"

She considered the question. "No. You didn't really attack her, it was more like a debate, and it is something she really does need to consider."

Harry nodded and turned to the door, opening it for her. As she walked back into the train, she saw Susan Bones watching them come in. Ginny could not help the slightly smug look on her face, but she did try to contain it. After all, the competition was not really over yet and Susan was a nice person.

Ginny started applying her makeup. It had been hard, but she had finally talked her mother into letting her use a little. Her Harry had liked it when she used a little -- just a little lipstick and something to bring out the color of her eyes. She was almost finished getting ready for the big party Sirius was throwing for Harry's fourteenth birthday today.

Outside her door, she could hear her mother. "Be sure you follow all the rules I've told you about for these situations"

"Yes, Mum," said a bored Ron.

"If you do something to embarrass your sister or our family, you will be sorry."

"Of course, Mum."

"Be sure to address him as Mr Black for this party, unless..." her mother's voice faded as they went further down the stairs.

Ginny mentally giggled at her brother; she could easily imagine his expressions. He was doing so much better than he had been at the beginning of their third year. At the rate he was maturing, he might

even be ready for Hermione to date him before they finished Hogwarts.

She thought about the upcoming party. Both she and Ron had received invitations. The party officially started at two and ran until six, but all the boys were to be there at half one. In talking to Harry about it, he had told her there were five boys invited and seventeen girls. When she asked about it, he said it was Sirius's idea and he knew little about it, other than Sirius also told him it was traditional to have an after-party party at six for those who had some sort of a tie to the family or who were closer in some way. That split also allowed those who had other obligations, or who wanted to leave, an opportunity to do so. Other than the fact that Sirius provided a Portkey for every guest, the intricacies of the party and the underlying motivations were beyond him at this point. This was more of the sort of Pureblood traditions that his godfather was trying to teach him.

Finishing her makeup, Ginny put on her dress robes and looked at herself in the mirror. While Ron had complained about having to wear dress robes, even though their mother had bought him new ones, Ginny had been happy to get some new ones for the occasion. Hers were pale blue and she thought they looked very nice on her. Unbeknownst to her mother, Ginny had applied a slight "lifting" charm in the top portion, helpful to the thirteen year-old girl who knew she still had more to grow there. Her hips were starting to change and she liked what she saw there. Hopefully, Harry would, too. Done dressing, she grabbed her wand and put in under a strap on her thigh. It would be a little hard to pull out quickly from that hiding spot, but she probably would not have to draw it. Still, she never left home without it.

Looking at the clock, she saw that it was about ten before two. She had nearly half an hour before her Portkey went off. When she had asked Harry why hers went off at seventeen after two when the invitation said the party started at two, he had only said that Sirius thought it best that everyone arrive at their own time. It had only take her a few minutes after that to work out there were seventeen witches in their year, and if they arrived in alphabetical order, and there were no other names after Weasley, she would be the last to arrive. After

some consideration, she decided that she liked the idea of arriving last.

Her mother came up behind her. "Ginny dear, are you ready?"

"Yes, Mum."

"Turn around slowly. Oh, very nice, dear. If that doesn't get Harry's attention, then he needs to get his eyes checked."

Ginny blushed. "I hope it does get his attention."

"Just remember, dear, this is a formal occasion. Use formal names until the person tells you otherwise." Her mother smoothed her left sleeve slightly before checking her hair. "How are you and Harry getting along?"

She could not help her grin. "We're doing well. We've had some really nice conversations over the last month and he put his hand on mine during the train ride home."

Her mother gave her a light hug, so as not to wrinkle the robes. "I'm glad things are going well for you. Ignoring the fact that Harry would be a good catch for any young witch, he's just a nice young wizard and you two seem to be so right for each other. Your personalities complement each other."

Ginny could not help but smile. "Thanks, Mum. I have to agree." They occasionally had rough moments, but Ginny did love her mother.

There was a knock at the back door, causing the two to jump slightly. Her mother drew her wand and walked towards the door. Ginny looked through the doorway into the kitchen at the family clock, noting it was about two minutes before two. She also noted that Ron's clock hand said "Home" for some reason. She turned just in time to see her mother open the back door.

"Sirius? What are you doing here?" Her surprise was very evident in her voice. "I thought you'd be at the party."

“Pardon me, Molly, but I need to return something to you.” With a flick of his wand, Sirius floated a very stiff and slightly bluish Ron through the back door. He propped her brother against the wall. “I hope you’ll forgive me for running so quickly, but you are correct. I do have a party to chaperone.”

Her mother’s eyes narrowed and a look of scrutiny came over her. “What has my son done?”

“Had I not stepped into harm’s way, I believe you’d be treating him for a few bruises, but I’ll leave the interrogation to you. Oh, the magic topic you need to find out about is ‘Slytherins.’ Ta-ta for now.” Sirius Disapparated with a small crack.

Ginny watched her mother’s anger grow, even though nothing was said. The woman stormed out of the room, leaving Ron still in the body bind and leaning against the wall. Walking over, she saw Ron’s eyes were very wide and they looked fearful. With a shake of her head, she said, “You’re right to be scared. I’ll ask Harry what you did, but I can’t believe you let your temper get the best of you at a party.”

His eyes seemed to be glancing towards the door and then back to her. It was easy to guess what he was trying to communicate.

“No, I’m not going to help you get away. Besides getting me in trouble, it will only make things worse for you later. I will give you a piece of advice though. Be a man, fully admit what you did, and then take the punishment without complaint. It won’t be as bad that way.” Still, she would not want to be in his place.

Ron did not look happy, but she could only shake her head at his predicament.

Her mother walked back in with her wand drawn and a faint trail of steam coming out of her ears. Ginny gulped at the thought of her mother having the need to take a shot of Firewhiskey before dealing with any of them. With her Portkey in hand, she carefully said, “Mum, I’ll go get Dad from the shed and send him in, then I’ll wait out in the back garden.” Her mother nodded as if afraid to speak. Ginny all but ran from the house.

She hurried to the shed out back. "Dad! Dad!" She flung the door open. Her father was bent over his workbench looking at a small device. Only her knowledge from the other timeline allowed her to identify it as a blender.

"What is it, Ginny?" He was as calm as ever, not reacting to her obvious distress. It was the product of years of experience with seven children, including a set of very active twins.

"Dad, Sirius just brought Ron home from the party in a full body bind. Mum hasn't said a word yet, but I think she went and took a shot of Firewhiskey. She had her wand out too."

Her father dropped the tool in his hand and started running for the house without a word, his wand in hand.

Ginny shook her head as she contemplated the situation. Ginny felt she could take her mother in a straight up duel, but her mother's temper was also legendary and, Ginny was certain, larger than hers. Everyone was correct to be wary of the woman's wrath. While Ron was a real prat and generally deserved everything he got, she hoped her father saved her brother this one time.

As she waited in the shade of the shed, she realized there was no shouting coming from the house. Given what magic could do, she was not sure if that meant a silencing charm was in effect, or if her father had done something so her mother could not shout and hex her brother. With a smile, she considered that there was bound to be a good story behind this.

Suddenly, there was a pull behind her navel and she started flying through the ether. A moment later, she landed with ease on the porch of a house.

Sirius stood in the doorway. "Welcome, Miss Weasley. Please come in."

"Thank you, Mr Black, and thank you for inviting me."

"I'd say it's my pleasure, but I think Harry will enjoy your company more. You look very nice this afternoon," he complimented her as he closed the door. "You remember Miss Jones, I trust?"

"I do. Good afternoon, Miss Jones."

"Miss Weasley. If you'll come this way, there is one more person to greet."

She was steered into the hallway leading to the living room. There was Harry in black dress robes and looking very dashing as he stood in the wide doorway. "Harry," she softly greeted him.

"Ginny." He took her hand and kissed the back of it, before he pulled her closer and kissed her cheek. "You look exceptionally pretty today."

She could not help her blush. "You're looking very nice too, and I hope you're having a happy birthday."

"Thank you. May I escort you to the snack table? Would you like some punch?"

"Yes, thank you." She smiled. "You're being very formal."

He grimaced slightly. "You don't know how much time Sirius has spent the last couple of weeks verbally beating this stuff into my skull. I never knew there was so much to know. The idiot Headmaster really should offer classes for this stuff."

"You mean like a Wizarding Studies class, to complement the Muggle Studies class?" Ginny noted that Hermione was getting a biscuit and looked up at her voice.

"What a wonderful idea for a class," Hermione said with enthusiasm. "I've read several books, but an actual class where we could practice this would be very helpful."

"Indeed," Harry dryly said as he picked up a glass of punch and handed it to her.

"Thank you, kind sir," Ginny told him. "So," she said as if discussing a secret, "what did my brother do?"

Harry laughed and even Hermione chuckled. Neville had wandered over and he laughed as well.

"Your brother seemed to take exception to the fact that there are Slytherins at my party." Harry nodded to a small group across the room that included Tracey, Daphne, Pansy, Millicent, and Blaise. "While he managed to contain himself at first, Blaise said something to him about his robes fitting for once and Ron just lost it for some reason."

"Blaise's comment wasn't even all that bad," Neville added. "Perhaps it wasn't the politest thing he could have said, but it wasn't said rudely."

Ernie walked over. "Ginny," he said with a nod before he smiled. "You should have seen your brother."

"I was just finding out about that." She looked back to Harry. "So what happened when Ron lost it?"

"Oh, he started shouting about how Slytherins can't be trusted, how Blaise was just like Malfoy and a git..." Harry paused and looked at Neville.

"And he demanded that Blaise leave because he shouldn't have been here in the first place. Then he tried to draw his wand." Neville shook his head. "It was sad really. The only good thing is that Sirius was around to stop him."

"That the girls weren't here to witness it was also good," Ernie said.

"True," Harry agreed. He looked at Ginny. "Sirius said he saw you when he took Ron home." His look changed to one of eager amusement. "What happened before you left?"

Ginny shook her head. "Mum was so angry she was speechless at first." She decided she should leave the Firewhiskey part out until it was just Harry. "I ran outside to get Dad, who was in the shed in the back garden. When he ran inside, I stayed out in the shed."

Harry chuckled. "That was probably wise on your part." Hermione nodded in agreement. Harry suddenly frowned for a second. "If you'll excuse me, I was just reminded that I need to circulate."

Ginny looked around and saw Sirius giving Harry a pointed look before her friend walked away to talk to Megan Jones and a few other Ravenclaws, including Stephen Cornfoot, the last boy she had not originally noticed. Looking around, she did see all seventeen girls in their year.

"Neville?" He looked at her. "Do you know why Harry, or rather Sirius, invited just you five boys while he invited all of the girls?" Hermione looked interested in that too.

"I believe so."

"And?" Ginny prompted him.

"Sirius is following the old traditions with this party, so he's only invited the boys from the families who would understand those traditions."

"You mean they're all Purebloods?" Hermione asked, looking slightly upset.

Neville smiled. "That would be one way of putting it. Don't worry though, I'm sure the next party will invite everyone. It's sort of how it's done, or so Gran said."

"But if that's true, then why am I here?" Hermione's tone was demanding, although her voice had not been raised.

"You have noticed that you're not a boy, right?" Ernie piped up with a grin on his face.

Hermione frowned at him.

Neville grinned at the by-play. "You have noticed that all of the girls in our year are here, right?" he asked.

"Yes, so what?"

Ginny shook her head. This was where a book was just not good enough, she thought.

Neville must have been thinking the same thing as he was shaking his head slightly too. "So, Sirius is making sure feelers for family connections are being sent out and he's trying to find out where true interest lies for Harry, as well as where Harry's interest lies."

A few seconds later, Hermione started to look incensed. Ginny laid a hand on her friend's arm to calm her down. "Hermione, at fourteen, these sorts of things don't mean a lot, especially to Sirius and his more enlightened, you might say, views."

"She's right," Neville said.

Ernie nodded his agreement too. "It's really just a way for us to meet socially outside of school and without houses getting in the way." He looked around. "Although, I think you could successfully argue that most of us have trouble mingling with others from a different house." He shrugged at his own comment. "Now if Harry were sixteen or seventeen, there would be fewer of us here and there might also be parents here as well."

"You mean to make marriage arrangements? I thought the book was outdated when it mentioned those," Hermione said with incredulity.

Neville shrugged. "They're becoming less common, but they still happen, especially in the conservative Pureblood families who will only allow their children to marry other Purebloods."

"That's ... that's just wrong," Hermione quietly said.

Ginny did not argue as she generally agreed with her Muggle-born friend, but she also understood what Neville implied. It was a part of their world. Noting that Harry had moved on and was now talking to Susan Bones, who was standing very close to Harry, along with Hannah Abbott, Ginny decided to circulate as well, so she started slowly crossing the room to the Slytherins.

On her way over, she passed by Sirius's cousin. "Miss Black, it's good to see you again." It was not hard to guess that her presence was to help the Slytherins feel more comfortable.

"Miss Weasley." Narcissa gave her a smile and a nod. Ginny appreciated the woman not holding Ron's actions against her.

Ginny continued her walk across the room. Fortunately, Pansy and Millicent had moved off to the side, leaving Tracey, Daphne, and Blaise alone.

After greeting them, to make sure nothing was misconstrued, Ginny made sure she was smiling when she said, "Zabini, I'm not sure whether I should hex you for my brother's sake or if I should pay you for the entertainment. What do you think?"

Zabini's neutral expression slowly changed into a grin, as did the two girls with him. "I'd take an entertainment fee." After a moment, he asked, "You're not upset with me?"

Ginny shook her head. "No, I understand that he let his biases and temper get away from him. It's nothing new." She grinned again before she said, "It only remains to be seen if he will still be alive when I get home this evening." All three Slytherins laughed. She watched Zabini look at his companions and nod at the table; the two girls walked away. Ginny wondered if there was a pecking order inside Slytherin and, if so, how it worked.

"I saw you talking to Potter earlier. You aren't going to rescue him from your competition?" The dark skinned Slytherin seemed to be the epitome of calm and collected as he talked with her.

She looked over and saw Susan was still standing very close to Harry, but she also saw that he looked a little uncomfortable. His reaction and her extra mental age gave her confidence.

"He's a big boy," she replied. "I know where I stand with him and I'm not worried. Besides, why does it matter to you?" It was not an idle question; she really did wonder why he cared.

"It's always good to know where people stand and where they are going," he replied casually.

This was a true Slytherin, she reminded herself. On the other hand, she was a Gryffindor and there was no reason to be subtle in this case. "And where do you stand, Zabini? Could Harry count on you if he needed to?"

He carefully scrutinized her for a long moment, not showing any shock at her question. "You're not in the proper position to be asking that question," he finally said. When she smiled and raised an eyebrow at him, he added, "Or are you really that confident?"

"I think I can safely say that I'm his best friend and will remain that way for a very long time."

Now Blaise's right eyebrow went up for a moment. "Even better than your brother or Granger?"

"I believe so," she said a little more confidently than she felt, but it was the way the game was played. And if she could win this game, Harry would have an inroad into Slytherin.

He thought about that. "Has anyone told you that only you and Bones received a kiss during the greeting?" He gave her a sly smile.

That hurt a little, but she did not let it show. "As you said, she is the competition, but I'm confident that he'll choose me." She noticed that Harry was looking over at her now, and he was frowning slightly. She wondered if he saw Blaise as competition for her. She would not play jealousy games with Harry, but she did wonder what he was feeling and thinking at the moment.

She looked back at Blaise, who had been watching her and probably Harry, she realized. "Are you three, assuming you can speak for Greengrass and Davis, interested in joining a study group for our Defense class? Harry would invite you if I asked him to and you promised to at least be neutral."

Zabini looked completely surprised for the first time. "I could see where Potter would accept us, but what about the others?"

His objection was obvious. "They will follow Harry's lead, or he won't tolerate them. That includes my brother."

He laughed. "You almost make me want to accept just to observe that discussion."

Ginny smiled. "Harry's smart enough to hold that in private. Let me know if any of you three are interested." She left him and walked toward Harry, who seemed to be happy to see her when she arrived. Susan frowned slightly, but nodded before she turned and sought out someone else to talk to.

"What's up with Zabini?" he asked quietly.

"I was evaluating him to see if he had any interest in joining your Defense study group." Harry looked surprised. "I told him he'd have to follow you and at least be neutral. He said he'd think about it. He'd be a good person to make a friend with. You can trust him if he gives you his word." He gave her a questioning look. "Yes," she answered, understanding he was asking about other timeline experience. "Davis and Greengrass too."

Harry looked very thoughtful for a moment. "I'd have to make a couple things clear to Ron and few others if I did that, but I can see the advantage."

Ginny grinned and went up on her toes so she could whisper in his ear. "Both of you are good about building bridges to others."

He blushed slightly.

“Besides, you’re cute, too,” she flirted with him, turning him even redder before she walked away. She would flirt with him some more as the afternoon went by.

Ginny landed in the back garden of The Burrow in an excellent mood. She looked at the Portkey, a piece of black marble about the size of her fist that was in the shape of a dog. He was lying down and had a happy look on his face. The party favor would make a nice paperweight.

She looked up at the stars and let out a happy sigh. Things were going so much better than nearly a year ago when she had had a talk with Harry on the evening of her birthday. With a big grin on her face, she walked into the house. Only her parents were in the living room. Her father was reading a Muggle book on how things worked, while her mother was knitting. Ginny guessed they were the start of what would become the family’s Christmas sweaters.

Her mother’s look of concentration changed to a questioning look as Ginny closed the door behind her. “How did it go dear? Did you have a good time?” Her father looked at her with interest too.

“It was lovely,” she all but gushed. “I had a great time and I was the only one that Harry kissed good-bye.”

“I’m so happy for you,” her mother said as she got up and came over to give her a hug. When she let go, Ginny saw that her father had a mostly happy look, but there was some reservation about him.

“Don’t worry, Dad. He only kissed me on the cheek.” That settled her father. She had kissed Harry back on the corner of his mouth, as if she was going for his cheek and had missed. Based on his blush, she thought Harry knew she had done that on purpose.

“And? Is there anything else we need to know or do?” her mother asked, in a leading sort of way.

Ginny could easily guess what was going through her mind and blushed slightly. "No, Mum. Harry and I will work things out on our own. Sirius would understand if you came to talk to him about some sort of agreement, but Harry wouldn't, and I don't want to scare Harry off."

Her mother gave her a small squeeze on the shoulder. "I understand dear and I trust you on this. Harry is a good boy, but you're right, he wasn't raised in our world." She paused and her look became a little more concerned. "Please don't rush things too much, Ginny. Proceed carefully so you keep your good reputation."

Ginny smiled at her mother. There were times Ginny was frustrated with the woman, but most of the time, she was a good mother. "Don't worry, Mum, I will." She looked to her father and then back to her mother, almost afraid to ruin the moment. "Dare I ask ... how's Ron?"

Her mother's expression darkened considerably and she returned to her seat. After a moment, she said, "He's grounded for the rest of the summer."

At least he is still alive, she thought.

"You may go talk to him if you'd like," her father said, "but please don't tempt him with outings. He will be on a very restricted schedule."

Ginny wondered what that meant. "All right. Well, good night then." They echoed the "good night" and she went up the stairs. Curiosity overcame her, so she continued up the stairs, past her room, to the top floor. She started to knock on the door, but stopped when she heard sniffing sounds coming through the door. Ginny knocked lightly and then opened it.

"Go away," a raw and almost hoarse voice told her.

"Ron," she tentatively said.

He rolled over on his bed to face the door. "What? You've come to make fun of me too?"

She was shocked at the sight of him. He was very red in the face and it was not from blushing. It appeared he had been crying, although it would not be kind to ask. "No, I came up to make sure you were all right."

Ron gave an angry snort. "Not likely. I assume you heard?"

At least he was talking to her and not taking out his anger on her. "Harry explained what happened at the party, and Dad told me you were on a restricted schedule as well as grounded. That's all I've heard. I guess you have a lot of chores assigned?"

He gave a short slow sad laugh. "If only. You'll probably have few chores for the rest of this summer, as I'll be doing them all. About all I'll be doing is chores, my summer homework, and," he face scrunched up and he said in a mocking voice, "etiquette lessons. An hour every day, I'll have them; thirty-one lessons between now and school," he practically snarled and then hit his bed with his fist. A moment later he quietly said, "I've never looked forward to school as much as I do now, not even first year."

Her heart went out to him, but he did deserve all that from what she had heard. "That's not fun, but it doesn't sound too bad."

Now he looked angry. "Not bad? You want bad? How about no flying for the rest of the summer and I can't go to the Quidditch World Cup! They've already given my ticket away to Lee Jordan." He looked down at his feet, very depressed.

It was all Ginny could do not to look at him in horror. She knew he had been wanting to go from the moment they first heard it would be held here in England. When her father announced he had gotten tickets for all of them a few days ago, Ron had been over the moon. Now, it had all been ripped away from him. A restricted schedule indeed, she thought.

What could she say? Nothing would help. "I'm sorry," she quietly said.

He just nodded.

"I'll see about getting Harry to come over and visit, and Hermione too. They can talk to you while you do things around the house," she suggested hopefully.

Ron just shrugged, not even looking up. "Sure, go ahead, although I doubt Mum will allow it."

Ginny looked at him, his posture practically shouting dejection. She tried to give him a caring look. "You were doing so well this last year, Ron. I thought you were really starting to grow up."

He glanced at her and then twisted on his bed and lay back down, now staring at the ceiling. "Thanks," he said tiredly.

She understood that he was done with the conversation. "If there's anything I can do, let me know. Good night, Ron."

His hand flicked a wave in her direction, while he said nothing.

Ginny closed his door and went down to her room. She saw herself in her mirror as she walked in. The sight of her in her nice robes and all made up brought the party back to mind. Ron was in a terrible spot now, but she thought the day had been spectacular. Harry had alternated between small flirts and being shy, but he was paying attention to her.

((A/N: Here's some more character development and a turn in the right direction for Ginny. :-) My apology, but my fingers runneth over. We will hit 17 chapters in total.))

Chapter 16 - Connections

Ginny had almost hexed Ron this morning. Despite her and her mother's reminders to pack the night before, Ron still had left packing for the morning they were to leave for their fourth year. The only reason they had left The Burrow as soon as they had was because Ginny had gone into Ron's room and packed for him using a few swishes of her wand. The conversation still burned in her mind.

"Ginny! You can't do this to my stuff. You might miss something."

"Too bad, Ron," she told him firmly and completely unsympathetically after she had told him she was going to pack his trunk. "We're supposed to leave in ten minutes and there's no way you'd get done in time." She raised her voice as he started to argue, "Furthermore, I don't want to be late and considering you haven't been able to see anyone for the last month, I wouldn't think you'd want to be late either. If I missed something, Mum will just have to owl it to you."

His eyes went wide. "Do you know how embarrassing that is?"

"Probably about as bad as needing to have your sister pack for you. We can find out on the train when I tell everyone."

"Ginny!"

She ignored his protests and with a wave of her wand and muttered "Pack", all of his clothes and books went flying into his open trunk. Another wave of her wand caused his trunk to start following her as she left for downstairs. Her mother had given her a questioning look when she came down with Ron's trunk, but since they were leaving on time, nothing had been said about the situation.

Not seeing Harry on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, she quickly gave her mother and father a hug before boarding the train. Knowing that Harry preferred to sit towards the back of the train, she started searching in that direction. She said hello to the other students she knew, but her thoughts were mostly on Harry ... and wondering what would happen between them this year.

Since his birthday party, she had gone over to his house at least once a week and sometimes twice. A few times, Hermione had come over as well, as had Neville. Since Ron was grounded, not only had he been stuck at home, but no one had come over to their house, either.

The Quidditch World Cup had been a lot of fun. They had camped next to Sirius and Harry's tent. Hestia had joined Sirius when she was not on duty. Besides the general fun of the match and the party afterward, she had been very pleased to see that Harry had not reacted to the Veela mascots. She had also breathed a sigh of relief when they returned home, as there had been no Death Eater disturbance.

Ginny felt sorry for Ron missing the match, but she had gotten to know Lee Jordan a little better and had made a new friend with him. To her surprise, even Hermione had enjoyed the match.

The best part of the last month was that Harry had been very friendly to her. He still had not made any "dating moves," but it was clear that he was enjoying being around her. He was even starting to tease and flirt with her a little. And based on what little Harry and Sirius had said about visitors, there had been no others. That meant Susan Bones had not been over, she thought with a grin.

Near the very end of the train, she finally found the compartment the rest of their mutual friends were sitting in. She quickly noted that Hermione and Neville were sitting on one bench (although not very closely), and Harry was by himself on the other bench. She opened the door to join them.

"Hi!" she called.

"Hey, Ginny!" was chorused back.

Harry sprang to his feet. "Here, let me help you." He grabbed her trunk and put it up on the overhead shelf before sitting back down by the window.

“Thanks!” she told him with a big smile as she sat beside him, as close as felt she could without bothering him. They were almost touching.

Ron came in as well. “There you all are...”

“Hey, Ron.” Harry gave him an easy grin. “Doing better?”

“Yeah, thanks.” He looked a little sheepish for a moment. “And thanks for forgiving me for what I did at your party. Like I told you in the letter, I didn’t mean to cause a fight at your party; I just got a little carried away. I promise it won’t happen again.”

Harry gave him a wry grin, one that promised fun at Ron’s expense. “As I said in my reply, that’s good to hear, mate. It’s even better because Blaise will be joining our Defense study group this year.” Ron gulped and paled slightly; he also shifted nervously as he considered that. “As will Tracey Davis and Daphne Greengrass,” Harry added after a few more seconds.

A flicker of unhappiness now crossed Ron’s face, but he quickly banished it as he swallowed. “I uh, I guess I’ll need to put everything I learned into practice, then.” As if he was searching for a quick out, he looked over at the other bench. “Neville, Hermione, how’s it going?”

Neville casually smiled. “Good, Ron. I guess you’re glad to going back to school?”

Ginny thought that a little low, considering what Ron had just said, but her brother probably deserved it and Neville had been there at the disturbance Ron had caused.

“Yeah, it is good to be back.”

“It’s good to see you, Ron,” Hermione finally said in a soft voice, almost hesitantly. “I assume you have completed all of your summer lessons?”

Ron gave a low chuckle filled with chagrin. “Oh yeah. I finished them three weeks ago.” He grabbed his trunk and heaved it up to the shelf.

With it in place, he sat down next to Ginny. "So, have any of you heard what the big deal at school is this year? Percy keeps dropping hints that something's coming, but he nor Dad will say anything specific."

Ginny looked at Harry. He knew from two different sources, one of them being her. She could not believe Dumbledore was still going to have this event. He must be in deep denial about Voldemort really being gone, she thought.

"Yeah, Sirius told me," Harry said. "Hogwarts is hosting the Triwizard Tournament..."

"Really?" Hermione asked, interrupting him. "There hasn't been one of those in almost 300 years."

"How do you know that?" Ron asked, as if no one should know that bit of trivia off the top of her head.

"It's in Hogwarts: A History," she replied as if it should have been obvious.

"But of course," Harry smoothly said, preventing Ron from saying something that would start an argument with Hermione. "Anyway, that's what the big deal is. Apparently, Dumbledore is trying to reach out to those at Beauxbatons Academy and at the Durmstrang School of Magic. Sirius said they should arrive around Halloween."

"That will make the year interesting," Neville commented.

"Yes, it could be very fascinating. Just think, we can learn about the other schools, see how they teach magic, and make new friends too," Hermione said enthusiastically.

A quick glance around showed Ginny that each of the three boys was either rolling his eyes or restraining himself from doing so.

Hermione gave Harry a penetrating look. "Since you've heard that news, have you heard who the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor will be this year?"

Harry gave her a smile as he paused for several long seconds. Hermione's impatience was visible when he finally said, "Yes, I have. Professor Lupin will be returning. Sirius also said that he will be up for a day or two every couple of weeks to help out. His work as an advisor to the Wizengamot doesn't take all of his time."

Ginny was thrilled. Lupin returning was another sign that Voldemort was dead, as the curse on the Defense position was definitely broken. That really should have clued Dumbledore in, but perhaps the Tournament had already been arranged before Lupin had promised to return.

"That's wonderful." Hermione looked happy.

"It is," Neville agreed. "Professor Lupin has been the best we've had in that class."

"Has anyone else looked at the books for this year yet?" Hermione asked, leading them into a discussion on what to expect this year.

Ginny smiled to herself at Hermione's typical tactic for learning: ask (nagging where necessary) and discuss to death. While Ginny joined in the conversation, a part of her was slowly thinking about the tournament. Considering Barty Crouch Jr was no longer among the living, Ginny thought it unlikely, but Harry would definitely not be risking life and limb in the Tournament this time around; not if she could help it.

Ginny snuck out of the Gryffindor Tower and quickly made her way down to where the Goblet of Fire was. Just before she had left, she had asked Harry to save her a seat at the Halloween Feast that was due to start in about half an hour. At Harry's questioning look, she had told him she needed to verify that something would not hurt them later. She appreciated his quick nod and no more questions.

When she came to a section of corridor that was empty, she cast a Disillusionment charm on herself and continued on. While the charm was not perfect in hiding her, it was good enough, as most students did not watch what was going on around them too carefully.

The room with the Goblet of Fire was not empty when she arrived, as people were walking through it. Ginny hid herself in the corner and waited. When it cleared out, she quickly cast Charm and Jinx detection spells. Each came up negative, which pleased her greatly.

Ginny suddenly wondered if she could cross the age line, but she decided not to test it. As in the other timeline, her twin brothers had tried to enter their names, and -- as last time -- they had been ejected from the Goblet's vicinity and been given Dumbledore-like beards to the amusement of all present.

With a smile on her face, Ginny removed the Disillusionment charm and made her way to the Great Hall. As she walked in, she saw her friends standing to the side, trying to decide where to sit based on which position might have the better view of the drawing of names from the Goblet. She quickly joined them just as they were sitting down near the head table.

"Ginny, there you are," Hermione said. "I've been looking for you. Where have you been?"

"I wanted to go talk to someone for a minute before the feast," she smoothly lied. A small part of her hated to do that, but Hermione would freak out and cause all kinds of trouble if she knew what Ginny had really done.

"So which of the seventh years do you think will get picked?" Harry asked, saving Ginny from further questioning.

"It could be Angelina," Ron said. "Even though she's only a sixth year, she's already had her seventeenth birthday and I know she entered."

No one had a strong feeling on who it might be and the Feast started a few minutes later.

Ginny noticed that Ron, as on the previous evening, continued to glance towards the Ravenclaw table where the students from Beauxbatons were seated. His focal point seemed to be the part-Veela. Ginny knew she had months to make a decision, but she was

not sure if she should invite Bill to the final task of the Tournament or not. She knew that Harry's participation in the Tournament had been the only reason he had come, and that was when he had originally met Fleur. Without that meeting, would he meet her again, perhaps at Gringotts? Did she have the responsibility to bring them into proximity so they could meet again? They had been happy together, but what if there was someone else for each of them? She mentally sighed at the whirlwind of thoughts on the topic.

Professor Dumbledore finally stood up, as did several other people, after the evening meal was complete. The small group came around the head table and Dumbledore made a small hand motion. Everyone quieted down for the opening ceremony that was about to start.

Dumbledore cleared his throat, stilling the last few conversations that had not already stopped. "Welcome, everyone, to the Triwizard Tournament among the champions from Beauxbatons, Durmstrang, and Hogwarts."

At that moment, Filch slowly walked in, carefully carrying the Goblet of Fire on its stand. Everyone watched him place it at the front, next to Dumbledore.

"Thank you, Mr Filch," the Headmaster graciously said.

The cantankerous old caretaker gave a toothy grin before he shuffled off to the side to watch.

"Before the names of the contestants are announced, I'd like introduce the judges for this Tournament. From the Ministry of Magic and the Department Head of Magical Games and Sports, Ludo Bagman." There was polite applause, with a few loud claps for the former professional Quidditch player. "Also from the Ministry of Magic and the Department Head of International Magical Cooperation, Dirk Creswell." There was more polite applause. "And finally, the heads of the three schools: Headmistress Maxime, Headmaster Karkaroff, and myself." All the students clapped louder this time.

Dumbledore pulled out his wand and tapped the Goblet of Fire. A few seconds later, it changed colors slightly and then started shooting out

many sparks. As the last of the fountain of sparks shot up, a piece of parchment was ejected from the cup. Dumbledore casually reached out and snagged it out of the air. He looked at it, and with a grin and twinkling eyes, he announced, "From Beauxbatons, the champion will be Fleur Delacour."

The pretty girl stood and walked to the front while everyone applauded. Those from her school applauded the loudest and also shouted a few encouragements in French.

To Ginny's amusement, she noticed that Ron was practically drooling while he loudly clapped. She also noticed that Hermione had noticed her brother too. A glance at Harry showed him to be acting very normally. She worked carefully to keep the smug look off of her face.

"Yes, congratulations, Miss Delacour." Dumbledore turned to watch the Goblet, as did everyone else. A moment later, it started shooting sparks again, ending with another piece of parchment coming out. The Headmaster snatched it out of the air and announced, "From Durmstrang, the champion will be Viktor Krum."

As the international Quidditch star stood and shuffled his way to the front, there was more applause; and it was louder than for the French girl. A few of the students from his school chanted, "Krum, Krum, Krum."

Harry looked at her with a raised eyebrow and she nodded slightly. She hoped he had really been asking if Krum had been picked last time too.

"Congratulations, Mr Krum." Again Dumbledore turned to the Goblet, and for the third time it shot forth many sparks. Dumbledore grabbed the fluttering parchment and his smile grew slightly bigger. "From Hogwarts..." He paused for a second before he looked to the Hufflepuff table, "The champion will be Cedric Diggory." All of Hogwarts applauded loudly.

Ginny saw Harry look at her with a raised eyebrow. It was not hard to guess that he was asking if it was the same as last time. Then, to Ginny's infinite relief, she saw the Goblet pulse and then go dark. She

flashed Harry a big smile as he looked at her again, for she had told him during the summer that he had been in the Tournament in the other timeline.

As the Feast ended and they all started going back to their common room, Ron was practically bouncing with excitement. "So, who do you think will win? I hear Durmstrang teaches the Dark Arts; that could give Krum an unfair advantage."

"They wouldn't?!" Hermione exclaimed, starting an argument between the two.

Ginny chuckled at the two, as did Harry. She also considered that Harry would be safe this year and that Ron would have no excuse to be jealous of Harry. The year was going well so far and the Tournament was off to a good start, she thought.

Ginny was in a good mood this morning, and there were several reasons.

Firstly, there was no class this morning, as the first task of the Tournament was today. Breakfast had even been extended by an extra hour to allow those who wanted to sleep a little extra time to do so.

Secondly, even though she had no plans for the year, other than making sure Harry was not in the Tournament, the year was going very well. She was doing well in all of her classes, purposefully keeping her average score just a little behind Hermione. That meant she was ahead of her friend in a few places and behind her in others. Ginny has purposefully made sure she was second in their Defense class, right behind Harry.

Thirdly, Harry had recently convinced Madam Hooch to referee informal Quidditch games on two Saturdays a month. It allowed the house Quidditch teams to keep most of the rust off as well as add some entertainment to the weekends. Angelina was the Quidditch captain for the Gryffindor team now that Oliver Wood was gone, and she had let Ginny play Chaser last week in her spot to see how well

she could do. After the game, Katie Bell had seemed worried that she might lose her spot on the team to Ginny.

Lastly, Harry had seen very little of Susan Bones this year outside of classes and their Defense study group. In addition, Ginny had noticed that he had spent much of his extra time with her, and he had also been giving her a lot of extra looks since Halloween. When he did not think she was looking, she would catch him looking at her for a long time, and then his gaze would jump to Ron for several seconds, followed by a brief flicker to Hermione before coming back to her. After she had first caught him doing it, she had conjured a little mirror so she could discretely observe him while she studied. He was obviously thinking something through very thoroughly, and her heart hoped it meant something romantic would be happening between them soon.

Ginny went to breakfast with her usual group of friends: Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Ron. The conversation that morning was all filled with speculation about the first task and what the champions might face. A little searching showed her that Cedric looked pretty worried. That gave her hope that someone had clued the boy in about what he was about to face.

About half an hour before the first task was set to start, the group got up and started walking towards the arena that had been set up for the task. They wanted to get a good spot to watch.

When they reached the main doors, Harry pulled her to the side and gave her a nervous look. "Ginny?" His voice held steady, despite how he looked.

"Yes, Harry?"

"I, uh, I know this isn't something like a Hogsmeade weekend, but it's, uh, it's still kind of a social thing," he said hesitantly.

"I suppose." Ginny was not sure where he was going with this. They had just had a Hogsmeade weekend last Saturday and the group had all gone together.

Harry paused and swallowed several times. "Ginny? May I escort you to today's event?"

To say that she was shocked was an understatement. As she considered her feelings, she could not decide if she was more shocked that he had finally asked her to do something together that was potentially romantic, or if she was more thrilled that he had asked her and not someone else. As Harry's expression of nervous hope started to fade, she realized she was taking far too long to answer. She quickly, and noisily, cleared her throat to get him to hold on just a short moment longer.

She flashed him her biggest smile as she said, "Yes, Harry, I'd like that very much." She barely restrained herself from taking the initiative and waited for him to offer his arm. As he turned slightly and offered his left arm, she took it. They started walking and Ginny stood straight and proud. The occasional glance to the side showed Harry to be looking very happy, based on the size of his grin.

Looking forward again, she noticed their three friends were nearly fifty yards ahead, as they had not stopped walking, and had apparently not noticed that she and Harry were missing. Ginny was not sure why, but she found that amusing. The two of them walked a little faster to try to make up the difference.

"Harry?"

"Yes?" He still sounded nervous.

"Thank you," she simply said.

"For what?" He looked over at her; she met his gaze as they walked.

"For giving me a chance; for giving us a chance." She watched him carefully, wondering what he would say.

He did not say anything for several long seconds, but just watched where they were going. "Sirius told me that my parents were very happy together and he believed the reason why was because they were also best friends." He paused and turned to her. "I finally

decided that my dad would give me the advice to give my best friend a chance because it worked for him.”

Ginny heart fluttered and she again gave him her best smile. “You’re my best friend too, Harry, and I’m glad.”

Before he could say anything else, they both heard her brother ask in a loud voice, “Hey, what you two doing?”

They both looked up and across the remaining thirty yards or so separating the two groups. The other three were at the entrance to the arena. Ginny looked at Harry and saw a mischievous smile on his face. She figured a verbal prank was forthcoming.

As they reached their friends, Harry answered her brother’s question with a question. “What does it look like we’re doing, Ron?”

“Why is she holding your arm?” he asked, sounding as if he had no idea.

Ginny thought he probably did not at the moment. However, Hermione looked like she understood, based on her small smile, and Neville definitely did as he was grinning ear to ear.

“I don’t know about what you were told, Ron, but my guardian said it’s the customary practice when walking with a young lady.” Harry looked out over the stands, since the arena was built going down a hill like an amphitheater and they had come in at the top. “It looks like there’s space for all of us down on the second row from the bottom.” He did not wait for an answer and started leading the group, with Ginny was still holding his arm, to the place he had indicated.

“What?” Ron asked someone behind them. Ginny thought it was directed at Hermione, but no one answered him.

On the second row, Harry took a seat with her on the end and him on her left. Neville sat on Harry’s left, then Ron and finally Hermione on the other end next to some Hufflepuffs.

As more people filed in, she heard Neville quietly ask Harry, "You finally decided, then?"

She took that to mean that Harry had discussed the issue with Neville sometime in the past. She watched him nod.

"About time, mate..."

Ginny, and everyone else in the arena, could hear nothing else at that moment because of a great roar that came from nearby, though in the direction of the Forbidden Forest.

"What the bloody hell?"

"Ron!"

"Hermione, that sounded like a dragon!"

"I don't care, Ron. That's still no reason to swear."

Ginny couldn't hear a reply from her brother, but she exchanged looks with Harry and they each started chuckling at Ron's behavior.

"May I have your attention, please," the amplified voice of Headmaster Dumbledore said. "For this task, each contestant must retrieve the golden egg from a nesting dragon." The crowd gasped. "Each contestant has randomly drawn for a dragon and the order of appearance. While we have taken every precaution for your safety, we ask that no one leave the stands to enter the contest area. The stands are charmed to be fireproof, so if you need to, please duck behind the railing in front of you."

They all looked at the three-foot-high wall in front of each row in the stands. "Do you suppose that will really stop dragon's fire?" Neville nervously asked.

"I believe they hope the dragons won't breathe fire this high up," Ginny commented, looking thirty feet down to the floor of the arena, where a green dragon was being brought in and the contestants would stand. The dragon handlers, including her brother Charlie,

were bringing the dragon through the opening on the right. A much smaller opening for the contestants was on the left.

“That wasn’t my question.” Neville still looked nervous.

Harry snorted a laugh. “I think that’s all the answer you’re going to get.”

Neville muttered something, but before she could ask him to repeat himself, Dumbledore started the task. “The first contestant is Fleur Delacour from Beauxbatons.”

Everyone stood and watched the French witch enter the arena and they clapped for her. The other French students started shouting encouragements to her.

Ginny thought Fleur was trying to place some sort of sleeping charm on the dragon while she had also transfigured some rocks into what looked like rat-sized ants to try and get the egg and carry it back to her, but Ginny really did not pay very close attention. What had her attention was Harry’s right arm which had gone around her back as the task started, pulling her closer to him. As Fleur continued with her task, Harry’s hand started lightly rubbing her back and side, probably in nervousness, but she did not care. To Ginny, his ministrations felt like caresses and she enjoyed every second, even going so far as to close her eyes and revel in his touch for a couple of minutes. In fact, she was caught completely off guard as everyone started applauding again. Her eyes snapped open and she realized that Fleur was done and the dragon handlers were rushing in to work on moving the dragon out so the next could be brought in.

She looked at Harry and saw a big goofy grin on his face.

“You liked that?” she heard him quietly say.

Looking deeply into his gorgeous green eyes, she tuned the rest of the world out and nodded. “Who wouldn’t?” she asked rhetorically in a soft voice, blinking slowly. She felt like she was under a spell, perhaps under an Imperius, but she did not care.

He pulled her closer and she felt her left thigh, hip, and breast press against his body. Without conscious thought, her left hand went to his right arm and slowly moved up his shoulder. Without breaking eye contact, he turned to her a little more and his left arm came out and pulled her closer still. Her entire body was pressed against his and she was not sure if she was feeling her heart beating rapidly or if it was his, but someone's heart was pounding.

As if in a time-slowng spell, she saw him slowly lean the couple of inches down towards her and she instinctively tilted her head up and to the right, closing her eyes just before their lips met. Even in the cool November air, or maybe because of it, his lips were warm and soft. Her right hand automatically went to his other shoulder. It was not a long kiss, but it was definitely a great start.

They each pulled back a little and opened their eyes, blinking in a languid fashion. Ginny felt her chest heave, pulling in great breaths of air. Suddenly, Harry was leaning down again and this time, the kiss was more passionate, or maybe more intense. She reveled in his desire for her, ignoring everything around them, including another dragon roar and some announcement.

To her great disappointment, Harry was pulled back and partially away from her.

"Harry! What do you think you're doing?!"

She looked over Harry's shoulder at her brother. He looked more surprised than angry, which is the only thing that prevented her from hexing him. Ginny was pleased to see Harry give Ron a confident look and say, "What does it look like I'm doing, Ron? I'm kissing Ginny." She appreciated his being straight-forward and not apologizing for his action.

Ron stared at them, open-mouthed. Hermione was smiling and was obviously happy for both of them, as was Neville. Whatever Ron might have said was delayed as Dumbledore announced Viktor Krum. Ron looked torn over which activity to pursue, but finally gave them a look that she interpreted to mean that they would discuss this later

before he turned to watch the Quidditch star face off against a red dragon.

Ginny smiled and moved her hand to Harry's neck and pulled him back around and down to her. After a long kiss, with Krum and his dragon being completely ignored, she put her mouth to his ear and asked him, "What are you going to tell Ron?"

Holding her closely, Harry replied into her ear, "That it's none of his business. We like each other and I'd never hurt you. That's all he really needs to know."

Deciding that she wanted to hear the magic words as soon as possible, she asked, "So what does this make us, Harry?" She felt him lightly kiss the back of her cheek near her ear and shivered from the touch.

"Will you be my girlfriend, Ginny?"

Ginny pulled back slightly and kissed him deeply in her happiness. As they broke, she told him with a sultry smile, "I thought you'd never ask," just before the crowd roared and applauded. They both looked and saw Krum walking out with the golden egg and a burned arm. They had missed all of Krum's task, but Ginny really did not care, and it looked like Harry did not either.

They kissed several more times while the dragons were changed. When Cedric came out, Harry pulled her over to be in front of him, wrapping his arms around her stomach and pulling her in tightly to his body. She snuggled into him and enjoyed being held. Ginny also enjoyed the light kisses he placed on her head from time to time. She was not sure if he was doing this on his own or if Sirius had given him some pointers, but either way, Ginny enjoyed the time with him. She hardly watched Cedric at his task.

Thoughts of the other timeline came back to her and gave her desires to do more, but she held firm, even if it was only by the thinnest of threads. She would let Harry lead in this relationship.

When the first task was completely done and everyone started to return to the castle, Harry stayed put, still holding her. The other three stayed too. It was obvious their relationship would be discussed now.

Looking around to see who else was in the area, Ginny saw Susan Bones looking their way. It was obvious the Hufflepuff girl saw them. She wore a disappointed look tinged with determination to hold her emotions in. Susan gave her a stiff nod before turning and leaving the arena. Ginny appreciated the gesture; she would hold no bad feelings against Susan for trying, either.

Ron spoke first. "What are your intentions with my sister, Harry?" He did not look angry, but he did look very serious.

"Honestly, it's none of your business, Ron." Her brother started to bristle. "But because you're one of my best friends, I will tell you that she's officially my girlfriend now, and we plan to find out if there's more than friendship between us. All you really need to know is that I'll never purposefully hurt her."

Ginny was pleased to hear that. Since she was standing by his side and it was easy, she went up on her toes and gave Harry a peck on the cheek. "Thank you, Harry; that was well said." She looked at her brother, whose look had not changed. "I know you're my brother, Ron, and that you care about me. I appreciate it. But you don't determine who I see and who I don't. I want this and there's nothing you can do to change it."

Her brother stood there, his mouth slowly moving as if grinding his teeth. Neville and Hermione were watching it all, going back and forth as if it was a tennis match.

Finally, Ron must have come to a decision because he nodded once. "I know I shouldn't have been surprised by this, but I was. As long as you're happy and he's treating you right."

"Do you think I can't take care of myself, Ron?" she challenged him. She wanted to pull her wand out to look more threatening, but restrained herself.

"No," he said as he vigorously shook his head. "I know you can, it's just ... it's just that I don't want to see you hurt."

"And you don't know how to deal with me dating?" she softly asked, knowing he would never bring up his feelings first.

He nodded and looked down, shuffling his feet a little. "Er... You're not supposed to do this first. I don't think Fred and George are dating either."

"It's all right, Ron. Girls usually mature faster and the twins probably don't want to grow up," she told him with a wry grin to remove the sting.

Ron looked up from her and after a moment he matched her expression. "No, they probably don't." He looked at Harry and gave him a look of acceptance and nodded once. "Well, let's hurry back to the castle so we don't miss lunch." He turned and walked away with a quick stride, leaving soft chuckles behind him.

"Way to go, you two," Neville told them with a big grin as he slapped Harry lightly on the shoulder.

Hermione stepped forward and gave Ginny a quick hug, before giving Harry one too. "I'm so happy for both of you."

"Thanks," they both said.

Neville and Hermione left, walking quickly to catch up with Ron. Harry and Ginny slowly walked back hand in hand.

Ginny could not help but feel as if she was walking on air. "Harry?"

"Yes, Ginny?" He sounded pretty relaxed and happy too.

"I'm curious why you asked me today and not last Saturday when we all went to Hogsmeade. What changed in the last few days?"

Harry blushed and looked straight ahead, as if he could not look at her. "I, I had originally planned to ask you last weekend."

“And?” She really wanted to know now.

He continued to blush. “I’m afraid my Gryffindor courage failed me.”

She could not help it, she giggled at that.

“What?” he asked, looking truly perplexed.

“Ignoring the fact that you’re one of the bravest people I know, did you really think I’d say no after everything I’ve done and said to you?” She looked at him with amusement and waited. He finally turned to look at her and a sheepish grin broke out.

“When you put it like that, no; but it’s still a big step anyway.” As they neared the castle entrance, he stopped for moment. “Do you remember what you once said to me, about wanting to be the best girlfriend and never letting go?”

“Yes; so ...?” Ginny was not quite sure what he was trying to say.

“I know I can end things in the future, but that statement was still a little scary. Am I ready for this to be the last relationship I have, when it’s the only one I’ll ever have, too? I mean, what if it’s a mistake and there is someone else out there who’s better? For both of us?”

Ginny thought she understood now and she could see his point. “And yet you asked me anyway,” she told him softly. He nodded. “Thank you for your trust, Harry. I do promise you that I’ll be the best girlfriend that I can be, and more if you let me. I’ll do my best to not only make you happy, but to give you a good life and a good family, if you want that with me. If you haven’t thought about all of that yet, I mean that life won’t be perfect, but I’ll never give up on you. I will push you to do the right thing and to become a better man. We’ll argue sometimes and even be mad at each other for short periods of time. But I promise that I’ll always care for you more than anyone else, if you’ll let me.” She gave him a short and gentle kiss on the lips. “If you’ll let me, Harry.”

She looked into his green eyes as he stared into her brown ones. She wondered what he was thinking about, how he saw her after what she had told him. To her great pleasure, she saw him lean down, close his eyes, and kiss her. After a moment, she started to deepen the kiss and felt him respond accordingly. They finally broke apart after a long breathless minute and rested their foreheads against each other.

"I think I can live with that. We'll just need to see where this takes us. I won't make any promises now for what we might be in ten years, but I'll promise to be the best boyfriend I can."

Ginny took a quick kiss, not that Harry tried to prevent it or did not enjoy it too, based on his smile. "I can live with that, Harry."

Harry broke the embrace as his stomach rumbled a little, causing them both to chuckle. With an arm still around her, he started walking her inside. "We do need to eat lunch and then there are classes this afternoon."

"But perhaps we could discuss us some more this evening, such as ... in a broom closet?" she asked with wiggling eyebrows and a smirk.

Harry laughed. "I think we can find some time for that."

"I look forward to it," she said with a big grin as they walked in the main doors. She would have to write her mother soon. She was sure her mother would be very happy that Harry was now her boyfriend.

High on the castle wall, Minerva McGonagall looked down over the grounds. She had been up here since immediately after the competition, watching everything for security and to make sure everyone went where they should.

She had almost left her post to go to lunch when a small group of stragglers left the arena: a group of three and followed by a couple -- all of them her Gryffindors. Minerva watched them fondly, as they were some of her more active and upstanding students. The couple in the back, now walking hand in hand, had been especially under her

observation, as they reminded her of the boy's parents, although without much of the angst that lasted until their seventh year.

The first three went directly into the castle, while the couple stopped short, far enough away that their conversation would not be overheard without magical means. It did not take long for the moment to turn romantic. Minerva felt almost like a voyeur, yet she stood on the wall anyway to oversee their safety. A small part of her also lived vicariously in their moment, as the memory of her husband, who had been killed early in the first war, returned to her.

After a few minutes, they broke apart and went into the castle, and so she left the wall and went to have lunch herself. Perhaps she would tell them of James and Lily's first meeting one day, if Harry and Ginny were still together in three years.

As they started the last dance of the evening, Ginny thought back over the last few weeks.

When Professor McGonagall had announced the Yule Ball, Harry had asked her to go with him immediately after class. Being boyfriend and girlfriend meant that he had better ask her, but she was touched that he had not waited at all.

As in the other timeline, Viktor Krum had asked Hermione to go with him and she had accepted. Also, Hermione had not told Ron who had invited her to the Ball, and so her brother did not find out until the Yule Ball started. Surprisingly, Ron did not seem all that angry when he found out, and Ginny did not expect a flaming row when they all returned to Gryffindor Tower. Ginny wondered how much of that was due to her pushing Ron to grow up, and how much was Hermione not sending little signals that she cared about Ron as something more than a friend. Of course, the fact that Harry was not in the Tournament might have some bearing on it, as Ron would not be able to use the "Viktor is using you to spy on Harry" argument. For whatever the reason or reasons, Ron almost seemed to be enjoying himself with Amanda, a third year Gryffindor and one of Ginny's former dormmates from early in her first year.

Harry had been a real surprise too, she thought as she looked into his eyes while they danced a slow waltz. He had complimented her when he saw her in her dark blue dress robes; he had also danced reasonably well. When she asked him about it, he sheepishly admitted that Sirius had made him take a few dancing lessons over the summer, knowing the Yule Ball was coming and that Harry needed to know this anyway as head of the Potter family.

Things were going well between her and Harry. They had certainly found private time in various empty rooms around the castle, but she was pleased that they had also continued to spend time talking to one another, building on their friendship. Of course, it was a lot more fun now than in the past, as she normally sat in his lap while they talked.

Ron had not said one negative thing about her and Harry's relationship, although to Ginny's amusement, he also always looked another direction when she and Harry did more than hold hands. She could even make Ron leave the common room by simply sitting on Harry's lap. Ginny tried not to do that too often, but she did not restrain herself in that area much, either.

To neither her nor Harry's surprise, her twin brothers had been very supportive of them, as long as she did not count them trying to prank him once -- just so they could say they had and as an initiation into the family, they said.

Her mother had been very happy for them, and she had written that her father was happy for Ginny as well. Harry had waited until Sirius's next visit the castle to tell his guardian, but Sirius had beamed at them and given them both hugs. To Harry's embarrassment, he had told Harry, "I'm glad you finally figured that out."

As the song ended, she and Harry kissed, as many of the other dating couples did, before they started slowly walking back to their dorm rooms.

"I had a good time tonight, did you?" Harry asked her.

"Absolutely... I was with you," she told him with a smile and a wink, which made him chuckle.

“What if I hadn’t asked you?” He hastily added, “You know, because we weren’t dating.”

She resisted teasing him. “I don’t know, it probably would have depended on what mood I was in.”

“Oh?” he asked curiously and as if he genuinely wanted to know.

“Sure. If I was having a pity party about not being asked by you, I probably would have just stayed in my dorm room.”

He looked shocked. “You’re not serious, are you?”

Ginny nodded. “I am, or at least that was the plan I had three years ago.” She smiled at him and could see that he understood her meaning about when she had first come back in time. “Otherwise, I don’t know, I might have gone with someone else. It would probably have depended on who asked and why. If someone nice had asked me to go as a friend, I probably would have. If they wanted to use that to start dating, I probably would have declined.” She looked at him carefully as she asked, “If we weren’t dating, who would you have asked?”

To her surprise, he did not look or act embarrassed by the question at all. He thought about it for a moment as they started to climb the stairs up. He finally shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess I would have found someone.”

“Like Susan Bones?” she innocently asked.

Now he did blush. “Yeah, she would have been a good choice, but I haven’t really thought about her in quite some time.” He looked down at her with a half smile. “Someone else has been taking up all of my thoughts for the last few months.”

Ginny blushed ever so slightly now. That reminded her of her Christmas gift from him, which she had opened this morning. “Harry? Thanks again for my necklace; it was really wonderful.” They stopped on the stairs for a moment and held each other.

Harry briefly looked down at the gold necklace with a large ruby pendant around her neck, before he looked back up at her face. "I thought you deserved something really nice for everything you've done for me, starting from a few years ago until lately when you became my girlfriend."

Ginny looked down at his chest for a moment, before she shook her hair slightly and looked back up at him. "You're welcome, Harry. I like to hope that I had good motives, but even if they weren't as pure as I believe, I'm glad that you're free and can be happy."

"I think you had very good motives," he told her softly. "I've heard that love is a powerful force."

"It is," she whispered. Suddenly, as if by mutual decision, they both leaned forward and kissed.

A loud cough sounded behind them, forcing them to spring apart.

Ginny turned her head and saw Ron escorting his date back to the Tower. "Why do you have to do that everywhere?" Ron complained.

Ginny saw a smile come over Harry that she knew was going to mean trouble. Before she could stop him from saying anything to tweak her brother, Harry said, "Because we're in love, Ron. I'm sure you'll understand one day."

Her brother looked very surprised, his eyes going wide and his mouth moved for a moment, although it emitted no sound. He cleared his throat and tried again. "I, uh... OK, er, right. Umm, can you not do that so much where I can see it though?"

Amanda giggled and they all looked at her. It was enough to break the spell of the moment though, and Ron turned and continued to take his date back. Harry and Ginny continued to stand on the landing they were on, the Portrait of the Fat Lady easily in sight two floors up.

When Harry turned back down to her, she had to ask a question. "Do you really mean it, Harry? Or did you just say that to mess with Ron's head?"

A goofy grin came over him and he leaned his forehead down to hers. "I mean it, Miss Weasley. The last three weeks have been some of the best of my life. You have a part of my heart now. If you're careful, you can have the rest of it too."

Ginny kissed him again, mentally congratulating herself on all the time she had spent with Harry talking about things, getting him to open up. She might need to get him in the right mood, but he would share his feelings with her.

As they broke apart, he said, "I suppose we need to go on up before one of the professors comes along."

She reluctantly agreed and they finished their climb. Looking back down at her necklace and pendent, Ginny decided that she would need to be vague in her description of it to her mother. There was no need to encourage the woman to start planning weddings just yet.

((A/N: I should take the time to clear up a couple of things about Sirius. Based on some reviews, I can now see that I have not been clear enough on why Sirius has done some of the things he has. I had considered explaining some of this in the conversation on the stairs at Christmas in the last chapter, but didn't write it because it made the conversation too long. I now see that was an error on my part.

To clarify... Sirius still has his fun side and has not given up on his Marauder ways. I'm not showing much of that at the moment because Harry needs to learn his upcoming place in the Wizarding world, so Sirius has been concentrating on that. Does that make Sirius a hypocrit considering how much he hated what his parents did and stood for? If Sirius believed that was the "one true way", then yes it would; but he does not believe that. Sirius knows the Pureblood ways as he was raised as such. He also knows who is in power in the Wizengamot and that to change "the game", you may have to "play the game" so you can work from the inside to make changes. That is

why he is formal at times and why he is teaching Harry the old customs. Sirius is not trying to turn Harry into a Draco (not that he could); he is trying to prepare Harry to be able to hold his own when he steps into the adult world after Hogwarts. Harry will have political power as The-Boy-Who-Lived and Sirius wants him to be able to wield it as needed. To do that well, Harry needs to know the environment.

Based on another review, I should clarify 1 other thing. On the train when Harry was using Legilimency to detect if Hermione was telling the truth, he was NOT reading her mind or invading her private thoughts/emotions in any way (as Snape would have). I believe this usage is more like reading an aura, or in the Muggle world it would be using a truth detection machine that reads external signs). The reviewer thought Harry was being hypocritical as he did not like his thoughts read, but I did not mean for Harry to come across that way. Some people seem to be able to detect if a person is telling the truth by reading the subtle signs of body language, that is basically what Harry was doing, but with a little magical help. I personally don't see that as hypocritical of him.

Harry and Ginny are now officially together, Voldemort is dead, and this is basically where I had planned to end the main story. However, there are some loose ends that need to be tied up. Therefore, we have 1 more chapter still, mostly as an epilogue.))

Chapter 17 - Epilogue

Ginny and Harry walked towards the Quidditch pitch to see the outcome of the Triwizard Tournament. She softly sighed at the loss of Quidditch since the end of April.

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked.

“Just feeling a little depressed about no Quidditch for the last two months. At least we’ll be able to fly around here again for the last couple of days of the term starting tomorrow.”

Harry chuckled. “You’re really having withdrawals, aren’t you?” he asked with a teasing smile.

She playfully smacked him on the chest with back of her hand. “You’re just as bad, especially after your match when Gryffindor played Viktor’s team.”

“And I almost won it too,” he said with a very slight pout. “Even if Viktor says he wasn’t playing ‘all out’ to avoid injuries, I still think he was giving it all he had at the end.” Harry shook his head.

“You’re just sore because you wanted to beat him and the Golden Snitch took a lucky turn for him when you were in the lead of the chase,” she teased him.

Harry grumbled. “I had him beat.”

Ginny let go of his hand and put her arm around his waist. “I know you did, Harry. You just got unlucky, and that happens sometimes. Overall, you did play as well or better than he did.”

He put his arm around her shoulders and squeezed slightly, a smile on his lips from her compliment. “Thanks.” He took a deep breath and let it out, as if to let the depressing topic leave him. “So, who do you think will win the Tournament?”

"It's hard to say. They're all very close in points, so the time advantage to the leader will be very small." And there will be no Barty Jr to interfere, she thought.

"Take a guess anyway," he encouraged her.

"OK, I'll pick Cedric. How about you?" She really was curious who he thought would win.

Without hesitation, he said, "Fleur."

"Oh? Why?"

"I think she's the best in Charms. Cedric is good in an all-around way, but I think the maze and what's in it will favor someone who's very good in Charms. Of course, just like my game, one bad break could really change things."

"True," she said with a nod.

"Hey, isn't that your brother Bill?" he asked her as they neared the stands. Her brother was walking onto the pitch, not into the stands.

"Oh, good, he made it. I invited him to meet someone," she said a little vaguely.

Harry gave her a penetrating look.

"Yes," she quietly admitted. "It's something that needed to be done because I changed things. It may not matter, but I thought they deserved a chance to meet and decide for themselves."

They climbed into the stands and found a place with their friends. The third task started and everyone watched Cedric, Viktor, and then Fleur enter the maze in quick succession. Ginny had been amused to see that Fleur had successfully rescued her little sister in the second task. She was not sure what had changed to cause that. Perhaps the French witch had taken the contest a little more seriously without Harry in it, but that was only a guess on Ginny's part.

Also different from last time, there was a spell placed on each contestant. It projected a colored dot twenty feet above the head of each contestant. That allowed the crowd to see about where each contestant was, and made the task a lot less boring than in the other timeline. Supposedly, the three contestants could not see the dots while they were in the maze.

After about ten minutes of watching the dots move, occasionally pausing, while the contestants obviously were solving problems, the crowd moved just enough that Ginny saw her twin brothers on the other end of the row from them.

“Harry?” She leaned over to whisper to him. This was not something she wanted Hermione to know about. When he leaned her way, she whispered, “Fred and George are on the other end of our row. This would be a good time to go talk to them. I’ll even keep Hermione occupied.”

“You’re sure about this?” he softly asked.

She nodded. He shrugged and got up. Ginny quickly engaged Hermione in conversation about their OWLs next year. If the brunette noticed or cared about Harry getting up to talk to someone, she did not ask about it. A few minutes later, he rejoined her looking smug, but Ginny had to wait another ten minutes for his answer before Hermione wound down. Ginny looked at him, eyebrow raised.

He leaned over and whispered to her. “We now own thirty percent of what will become Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes, fifteen percent to each of us with our investment. We’ll talk about it more with them over the summer.”

“And our conditions?”

“We’ll be silent partners and they also agreed to finish school. They didn’t argue at all,” he said with a wry grin.

“I’m surprised it was so easy.”

He lightly chuckled. "I think it was the fear of your mother that motivated them to accept as is, at least after I mentioned it," he added wryly

She chuckled as well. "Probably."

It took another half hour for the blue dot to reach the center of the maze, passing the yellow and the red dot at the very end. As the hedges fell down, Fleur was transported back to the entrance of the maze holding the Triwizard Cup. The Beauxbatons students were cheering wildly, while all of the others were only clapping politely.

"Good call," Ginny congratulated her boyfriend.

"Thanks." Then his smile got bigger. "Of course, it will be interesting to see if there is a protest over her winning or not."

Ginny was confused. "Why would there be a protest?"

"Based on the colored dots above their heads, you saw how she passed them at the last minute, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"And you still remember that she's part Veela, right?" he asked with an expectant expression, waiting on her to put it together.

It suddenly clicked. "Do you think she stunned them with some Veela charm to win?"

"Possibly, but I don't think the rules discuss anything like that," his grin firmly in place.

A few minutes later, when Cedric and Viktor were back with everyone else, a small argument broke out. Ginny looked at her boyfriend suspiciously. "How did you know?"

"It's the obvious thing to do. I think it would have been more sporting of her not to do that, but I can't exactly fault her for it either. While she did complete the second task, she came in third there for a reason:

her Veela nature probably warred with her about going under water. Or at least the books say full Veela rarely go under water. I admire her strength of will to do it anyway, but I suspect that reminded her that she is a Veela.”

“That’s well reasoned, Harry.”

They both looked to Hermione, who they had not realized had been listening in. “Thanks,” he said with a small smile. “I don’t know that for a fact, but it seems reasonable to me.”

“Oh, look, Dumbledore has called Bill over. I bet he’s checking for charms cast or something like that,” Ginny hypothesized. She was glad she had invited her brother now. He was definitely getting to meet Fleur. What happened from here was up to them.

After an hour and many protests down on the pitch, Ginny and Harry walked back to the castle with everyone for a celebration of drinks and snacks. The crowd was led by Fleur, still proudly carrying the Triwizard Cup.

Ginny came bounding down the stairs of The Burrow, her pony-tail swinging behind her. As she hurried for the Living Room to wait for Harry, her mother called to her as she passed through the kitchen.

“Ginny dear, please find Percy in the back garden and tell him to come in. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes.”

“OK, mum.” Ginny hurried to find her brother. She had only been home for one day from school after their fourth year, but she was still anxious to see Harry. He was supposed to be here any minute to join them for dinner.

Running out the back door, she saw her brother sitting on the garden bench -- the same bench where she had had several very important conversations on over the last couple of years. She wondered what was so special about that bench that seemed to cause it. That question was more poignant than normal, based on the distressed look on Percy’s face. His posture of sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head slightly hanging down did not help.

“Percy? Is something wrong?” she asked with concern in her voice.

He had watched her come over, so there was no surprise, but he hesitated anyway. “Perhaps,” he finally said.

Ginny recalled several other serious conversations she had had with Percy about his future, and wondered if she was about to have another. “Anything I can help with?”

“I doubt it.” He pulled his hands up, interlocked his fingers, and set his chin on his hands, still looking straight ahead.

“If you’ll tell me, I can at least listen. Maybe you’ll figure it out on your own by trying to explain it to me,” she suggested, taking a seat next to him. It was a strategy she had used many times during the war with her old Harry

Percy sat there for a long moment. “I’m not sure it would be appropriate.”

“Oh? Try me. If it’s something I don’t want to hear, I’ll stop you; but I’ve heard about almost anything you could tell me, from fights to disaster.” He gave her a pointed look. “History is very useful, but you know what it’s like at Hogwarts. It is its own world, with most problems in miniature.”

He actually gave a short low grunt. “I suppose that true in a way, but Hogwarts doesn’t have parents there.”

“Ah,” Ginny wisely said, or she was trying to sound wise. “And what’s happened between you and Dad?”

Percy’s eyes went wide. “How did you know that?”

“Because if it was Mum, everyone would have heard about it when she yelled at you,” she said with short giggle, trying to lighten the moment; but Percy’s expression did not change. “So what happened?”

"We had a fight in his office today." He paused for a moment and looked at her, as if judging her in some way, before he added, "I said some unkind things. I stopped short of saying a few worse things, but we did not part on happy terms." He breathed deeply and looked to be struggling with something; Ginny said nothing. "I've been thinking that I need to go pack my things and move out."

"I see," she finally said when it was obvious he was not planning to add more. Apparently, her other talks with him had blunted the big argument that had led him to have a flaming row and become estranged in the other timeline, but the root problem was still there. "Ignoring how you said it, what did you accuse Dad of?"

Percy fidgeted.

"You can tell me, Percy. I won't try to blackmail you with it like the twins would. I really am trying to help," she told him gently. "As the youngest, I see and hear a lot more than many people would suspect, and I may be able to give you some advice." The fact that she was "older" than her brother thought, as well as that she had the other timeline knowledge, gave her a lot of confidence to deal with this.

Percy fidgeted some more while looking down at the ground. "I, er, I yelled at Dad for not doing more. I know he's capable of doing more, but he won't -- and I think it reflects badly on me. I get painted with his brush and I don't like it. I don't like being held back because of him." He finished with frustration in his voice.

"I see," Ginny slowly said. The problem was the same as in the other timeline. "Percy, will you answer a few questions for me?"

He looked at her, "I don't see how that..."

"Please," she interrupted. "Answer a few questions for me. It might help more than you think."

He shrugged. "I guess it can't hurt. What do you want to know?"

"If you could do any job you wanted, what job would you do?" she calmly asked.

Percy puffed up a little. "I'd be the Minister for Magic. I think I could fix some very real problems and make it better for everyone."

Ginny was not sure he could fix all that much, as the whole system needed to be redone, in her opinion, but that was not up for debate at the moment. "I thought so," she said with an innocent smile. "Now let's pretend you've worked hard and we're in the future where you're the Minister. You would work hard at being the best Minister you could be, wouldn't you?"

"Of course..."

"And you'd be happy doing that work, wouldn't you?" she asked just as innocently.

"Very..."

"Then what would you say to a person who asked you why you weren't working harder to get a better position?" she asked sweetly.

Percy sputtered for a moment. "B-but, Ginny... What are you talking about? I'd be Minister. There's nothing higher than that!"

"I suppose it's only from a library book, but I was under the impression that the Supreme Mugwump of the ICW was a more powerful position. Instead of being over only one nation, you'd be leading many nations." She smiled and waited.

"But that's just over a body of representatives, not over a whole country. The power of the Minister is immense; he can change the direction for a whole country. Besides, why would I want to get mixed up with those other countries?" Percy argued.

She had him right where she wanted him. "Do you see what you're doing, Percy? You've found a job you're happy in and you're fighting me to keep it, despite the fact that there are other jobs that are at least more visible in our world, and potentially more powerful. You're really saying that you're happy where you are and you don't care

about what others think if you don't try for the other jobs. Now think about Dad. What does he enjoy doing most?"

Percy sat there with a stunned look on his face, and Ginny let him think it through. As she did, she heard the back door to the house open. Looking up, she saw Harry. She smiled at him and held up her hand. He looked at her quizzically for a second before he nodded and returned into the house.

Ginny looked at Percy, who was still thinking hard. "You understand now, don't you?" She did not wait for an answer. "Dad does the job he does because it's what makes him happy. You've met others at the Ministry who do jobs they hate, haven't you?" He absently nodded, still half lost in thought. "I bet they're miserable, but Dad's not. Not only is Dad happy doing what he is, he's also a department head. How many of those are there? Fifteen?"

"Eighteen," Percy corrected her softly in a reflex manner.

"So adding in the Minister, Dad is one of the nineteen most influential people in the Ministry's administration, with hundreds of people below him on the ladder of power. That sounds like quite an accomplishment to me," she told him with pride in her voice. "He's near the top and he's happy. Can you imagine what Dad would be like as Minister? The stress would kill him." Percy slowly nodded. "So why should he strive to do something that would be not only disastrous for him and everyone else, not to mention make him unhappy?" She almost asked him if he was so cruel as to push their father into that, but decided at the last second that would be going too far.

Percy dropped his face into his open hands.

Ginny put her hand on his back and softly rubbed, like their mother used to when they were little. "What's the family motto, Percy?"

"Family first," he said, his voice muffled by his hands. A quick sniffle followed. "I've been a fool," he said a little bitterly. "I forgot how good I had it."

"You've only singed the bridge, brother, not burnt it. Go inside, admit your mistake, and apologize."

He pulled her into a hug and held her tightly. "Thank you, Ginny."

"Or, how about I send him out to you? Maybe it would be best not to do this in front of Fred and George," she said lightly.

Percy gave a couple of rough chuckles and a final sniffle. "Would you? I would be most appreciative." He gave her a pat on the back before releasing her. "Thank you again."

"Any time; you are my brother and I don't mind helping you when you're being a prat about something," she told him with an impish smile.

He laughed with her. "By the way, how are things between you and Harry? I saw him at the back door."

Ginny beamed. Harry was her favorite topic. "We're doing really well. How about you and Penny?"

"We're ... discussing things," he said vaguely.

She wanted to tease him about being the first to get married, but decided that would be a topic for another time. "That's good to hear. So, shall I send Dad out?" He nodded. "Don't worry, Percy. He'll always love you." She walked to the back door, thinking of when she had lost her parents in the other timeline. With a happy sigh at having them again, she opened the door to find everyone scrambling from the windows to hurry into the dining room.

Ginny shook her head. They were so predictable, and loveable, she thought. "Dad?" she called out as she walked into the dining room. He was standing a little stiffly behind his chair. Her mother was near him and looked as if she might have been crying. "Percy would like to speak with you in the back garden." She gave him a smile to let him know it would be all right. He walked over, gave her a quick hug and a whispered "Thank you", before he walked outside.

Her mother looked intently at her.

"We're a family, Mum. It will be all right." She had barely got that out when her mother rushed over and engulfed her in a hug, practically squeezing her to death. As her mother stepped back, she looked over and saw all of her family smiling, with Harry grinning the biggest.

Ginny took her seat beside her boyfriend, who took her hand in his under the table and squeezed it. "What did you tell me, Ginny? Family first?"

"Yes, Harry."

He squeezed her hand again. "I like that; I like that a lot."

Ginny thought that sounded great, like maybe she would not need to change her family motto when she changed her last name.

A very confident Ginny used the Floo to travel from home to The Three Broomsticks. She was a little early, but she had a reason. "Madam Rosmerta," she said to the owner of the pub, "I'd like to get some scones, fruit, and tea for two, as well as one of your private rooms for an hour."

"Certainly... Miss Weasley, right?" The owner and waitress asked with a smile and Ginny nodded. "That'll be three Galleons for everything. If you'll give me a few minutes, I'll get the food for ya."

"Thank you." Ginny sat down at a table facing the door.

A few minutes later, Rosmerta returned with a tray of food and a tea service. "Ya can have room one. Just leave everything there when you're done."

Ginny handed over three of the golden coins. She snagged a small cube of melon as she waited for her friend.

Two days ago at Harry's birthday party, Ginny had heard that Hermione had a meeting with Professor McGonagall today at ten in the morning, the same time Ginny did. Ginny quickly guessed the

purpose of the meeting and had invited Hermione to have breakfast with her an hour before. She hoped Hermione would understand what she was about to do.

While she waited, she reflected on her boyfriend, or rather her two boyfriends -- past and present. Even knowing what she did now, she was very sure she would have still come back in time to fix things, if she was again in the first timeline. Harry was still a wonderful person, but he was not the same as her old Harry. She could now admit this to herself now; she had been in denial for a while.

This Harry was more well-rounded, more knowledgeable about many things. That caused him to stop and think about something before acting -- usually. He still occasionally reacted, especially if someone needed help, but it was pretty rare. Harry was also learning the harder spells at a slightly slower rate. He did not have the drive to learn every combat spell he could get a hold of. He had the power to do whatever he wanted, but he was not as fanatical about searching for combat spells. Those and some other minor things were positives, she thought.

This Harry was also not quite as passionate about everything he did. He still cared and did things well, but some of his fervor was not always there, making him a little more easy-going. She missed some of that passion about life the old Harry had, probably caused from having to live life on the edge for so long, but not much was missing and she might be able to instill some of that missing passion given more time.

For the most part, the two Harrys were remarkable similar. Ginny thought that was because they had both been raised with the Dursleys in his formative years. Also, this was his personality: Harry would always be "a good guy", helpful, powerful in magic, as well as trusting and loyal. He also did the right thing, not the easy thing, and wanted everyone else to do the same. As she knew from personal experience a few years ago, winning Harry's trust back after losing it was not an easy thing to do, and she had only partially lost it. To each Harry, family was the most important thing in his life.

A young witch opened the outside door of the pub and walked through it, breaking Ginny's train of thought. With a smile, Ginny stood and grabbed the tray. As she walked towards the back rooms, the new visitor to the pub saw her and followed her.

"Hi, Ginny."

"Hi, Hermione. I've got us a room." She led the way.

"Oh? What's so secret? Wait, he didn't, did he?" Hermione walked quickly and looked at Ginny's left hand as she held the tray.

Ginny laughed. "No, not yet, but I don't think it will be long. Close the door if you would," she said as she set the tray down on the table there. After Hermione had closed the door, Ginny pulled her wand out and put a Silencing charm on the door. "Just for good measure so our gossip doesn't leak out," she said with a teasing tone.

Hermione harrumphed as she sat down and started pouring tea for both of them, before dishing out some fruit for herself. "I can't imagine who would care what we say."

"You never know," Ginny said mysteriously as she started filling her plate.

Hermione looked at her. "Are you going to tell me why you wanted to get together this morning now?"

"Sorry for the dodge, but I was afraid that if I told you that, our conversation would have overshadowed Harry's birthday party night before last. He's only seventeen once and I wanted it to be special for him," Ginny explained. "Plus, I was very distracted at the time," she added off-handedly.

"What would have disrupted the party?" Hermione looked genuinely confused.

"You told everyone that you had a meeting with McGonagall this morning," Ginny simply said, as if that should explain everything.

Hermione nodded. "We have a little less than an hour before I need to go."

"Before we need to go," Ginny corrected her.

"What do you mean?"

"I got a note in my class schedule to come meet with her this morning also, so when I heard that you did too, it wasn't hard for me to guess what the meeting was about. I thought we should discuss it before we talked with her." Ginny buttered a scone and nibbled on it while she watched Hermione work on the puzzle handed her.

Hermione's eyes suddenly went wide. "You think she's going to talk to us about who will be Head Girl, don't you?"

Ginny smiled. "What else could it be? I asked Harry if he was to be Head Boy and he won't answer me yes or no..."

"Meaning that he is and has promised not to say anything," Hermione finished.

"When you know Harry, it's obvious, isn't it?"

"True," Hermione agreed before she took a sip of her tea and thoughtfully looked over the rim at Ginny. "Do you want to be Head Girl?"

Trust Hermione to jump straight into the problem, Ginny thought. "Yes, but not for the same reason you do, so I thought I'd offer you a deal."

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean -- a deal?"

"Simply that. I know it's important to you to be Head Girl because you want on your resume, or CV, when you go looking for a job. I know that you've been planning on this since your first year here. You want the position for the prestige that comes with it. My primary motivation for the position is for the Head Boy that comes with it," she said with a smirk.

“WHAT?!”

Ginny lightly laughed at the predictability of her friend. “I’ll do my best in the job, but the main reason I want to be Head Girl is so I can spend more time with Harry. I’d be willing to tell McGonagall that I’ll concede and you can be Head Girl if you’ll agree to two things,” Ginny offered.

Hermione studied her very carefully for a long moment before a slightly distasteful expression came over her. “Why does it sound like you’re trying to ... blackmail isn’t right ...” Hermione struggled for a moment. “I don’t know what to call it, but why this offer?”

Ginny wanted to bang her head on the table. “Why does everyone always seem to jump to the worst possible conclusion?” she softly and rhetorically asked. Before Hermione could say anything, Ginny answered, “Most importantly, you’re my best female friend, so I’m not blackmailing you. I’m not even trying to manipulate you, as I’m telling you everything up front and I have no intention on forcing you to do anything. I’m just trying to make it easier for both of us to get what each of us wants. You want the prestige of Head Girl; I want maximum time with Harry.”

“So what do you want from me?” Hermione asked warily.

“Two things. First, when the patrol schedules are made up, I want to be assigned to always be with Harry.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” Hermione said, a bit hesitantly.

“Second, I want you to ignore my coming and going to the Head suites. If you’ll agree to both of those things, I’ll tell McGonagall that I don’t want to be Head Girl. If you don’t think you can agree, then I guess we’ll just need to let McGonagall choose between us. If I become Head Girl, then I’ll get what I want. If you become Head Girl, then Harry and I will have to find some other way to spend more time together.” Ginny calmly looked at her friend to see what she would say.

Hermione pondered that for a moment. "The patrol schedules are easy enough." She paused to think the other through, chewing on her lower lip slightly as she did. When her face lit and her eyes went wide, Ginny knew she had fully understood the request. "Ginny! You can't do that! It's against all the rules!"

She waved it away with her hand. "We break the rules all the time, Hermione. It only matters that we have a good reason."

"I do not!" Hermione protested.

Ginny snorted. "So says the girl who helped rescue the Philosopher's Stone in her first year, and who has helped my twinly brothers find spells for pranks on Slytherins," Hermione blushed at that one, "and who has borrowed Harry's Invisibility Cloak more times than I can count for a midnight run to the library and into the Restricted Section without a note from a professor, and do I need to bring up your few curfew breaks this last year with that seventh-year Ravenclaw? What was his name?" Ginny innocently asked as if she really did not know.

Hermione was very red by now. "All right, I get your point. None of us are perfect, but you can't be sneaking into Harry's room anytime you want just to have, well, you know..."

"What?" Ginny casually asked while raising an eyebrow.

Hermione nervously looked down and mumbled a word too softly to make out.

"I don't plan to have any need for Silencing or Contraceptive charms, if it really matters to you," Ginny said, wondering if her friend was jumping to the completely wrong conclusion.

"But, but you said..." Hermione sputtered.

Ginny laughed. "You really did think I wanted to visit him only to have sex, didn't you? Admit it."

Hermione was pink and looked down. She finally guiltily nodded.

"Tsk, tsk, Hermione. I will admit that I plan to sleep with Harry, but I don't plan on us having sex."

"But... I don't understand," the brunette said.

Ginny smiled at her, enjoying the tease. "I only want to sleep with him. There's nothing like going to sleep and waking up in his arms. I feel so ... secure, at peace with the world too." Ginny blushed a little now. "We did that a few times last year when we fell asleep in the common room. We got up early before anyone else did so we weren't caught, but even on an old couch, it was the best night's sleep I've ever had." In this timeline, she added to herself. She also mentally acknowledged that Harry might decide to take that last step before they got married, but she thought he probably would wait for their wedding night to make it more special.

Hermione shook her head in disbelief before putting her face in her hands. "I can't believe I'm having a conversation like this," she mumbled.

A laugh almost escaped, but Ginny held her amusement to a big grin. "If it would make you feel any better, I will also say that I expect to have a ring on my left hand in the not too distant future. I believe there is an old school policy that would let me stay with Harry based on our relationship."

"Really?" Hermione asked as she looked up in surprise, as if she thought Ginny was pranking her. "You expect him to ask you before school starts?"

"I believe that he is only waiting for my sixteenth birthday to ask me the special question," Ginny confirmed. "So I will probably come to school with a ring in September," Ginny stated with a happy smile. "Even better, as far as the school policy is concerned, we now have a Familial Agreement in place," she said smugly.

The brunette sighed. "I suppose this is another one of those obscure Pureblood traditions that I have not been able to find information on?"

“Possibly,” Ginny answered. “This one is one of the lesser-used ones nowadays, although it was popular a couple centuries ago.”

“Would you explain it to me?” Hermione looked hopeful at gaining new knowledge.

“The Familial Agreement,” Ginny started, as if lecturing, “can serve several purposes. In its most basic form, it ties two families together for mutual protection, much like a treaty does between two countries, although this agreement is magical and therefore more binding. It can also be used to tie two families together through marriage, by giving the other family right of first refusal. In this case, Harry would need to be consulted and turn me away before I could even consider another marriage offer in any form. Furthermore, and to my main point, once Harry makes an offer to me, I’m considered betrothed in every way except for legally, meaning I can’t sign documents as Ginevra Potter or legally represent Harry, but for all practical purposes, I can be considered to be married and would be fully under Harry’s protection, just as a wife is under a husband’s protection. From his point of view, he can mostly treat me like a wife, even requesting that I be with him or at least near him.”

“But why would people do that?” Hermione asked. “It seems so, so strange, backward even.”

“Because it gives me Harry’s protection so no one else can make a marriage offer in any form, and there are a few obscure Pureblood laws and traditions that can practically force a girl into a marriage. And because we’re only almost married, we still have the choice to break off the marriage before it does become legally binding if we suddenly decide we don’t love each other after all. In our present day of more choices and being less,” she waved her hand a few times as she paused to search for a word, “feudal, I suppose, it has fallen out of use. The more binding Marriage Arrangement is still used by some Pureblood families,” Ginny scrunched up her face to show what she thought of that, “but the Familial Arrangement does work in this situation. It takes me off the market, so to speak, and makes Harry more legitimate in the eyes of those in power. It also makes my mother happier,” Ginny added with a wry smile. “While she knows minds can still be changed, it gives her the comforting illusion of

permanence already -- although I don't think she would express it that way."

Hermione seemed put out. "When did you do this, Ginny? And why haven't you told me before?"

"We did it at the end of Harry's party, after everyone else went home. Since he was seventeen, he could legally sign the agreement, and of course, my dad signed for my family and for me. By tradition, Harry can make an offer for me the day I turn sixteen, and I believe he will do so on my birthday in nine days." She beamed at the thought of accomplishing her final personal goal from time-traveling.

Hermione shook her head again. It occurred to her to look at her watch and she frowned. "We really need to leave and I don't know what to say."

"You can think about it as we walk if you want," Ginny offered, grabbing the last scone as she rose. She took down her Silencing spell and led the way out, waving to Madam Rosmerta as they passed through the main room.

It was a quiet walk up to the castle as Hermione contemplated what Ginny had told her. "You're really serious about this, aren't you?" she asked Ginny as they approached the castle's front doors.

"I am. Have you decided?"

Hermione shook her head. "No. I wish you had told me sooner."

"I almost came over to your house yesterday to talk, but I knew you had a date with Ron last night and I did not want to do anything that might distract you or cause an argument between you two." Ginny looked at her friend with curiosity as they made their way through the corridors. "How did that go? Ron wasn't up when I left."

Hermione looked at her as if trying to decide how much to say. "I never appreciated how few details you and Harry share with the rest of us until now." A wry grin came over her. "Can I just say that you

were right about us and that will be our only date?”

Ginny barely contained her knowing smile. “Will you still be friends?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered without hesitation. “We actually had an enlightening talk after a difficult start. That led us both to understand friends were all we should be.”

Now Ginny did let her smile show. “Enlightening for you or for him?”

A slight blush colored Hermione’s face. “Probably more for me, but I think he had a few revelations too.” She was saved from further questioning as they had arrived at their Professor’s door.

Ginny smiled at her friend and knocked on the door. It was opened a few seconds later by their Head of House, looking the same as ever.

“Miss Granger, Miss Weasley. Please come in and make yourselves comfortable in a chair.” McGonagall closed the door and then walked across the office so she could sit behind her desk. As she made herself comfortable, she reached over to a tea set and poured three cups of tea.

“Good morning, Professor,” Hermione said, as if she was uncomfortable with the momentary silence. “It was a surprise to get a note from you for something other than my normal book list.”

“I can imagine,” McGonagall said cryptically, although not unkindly. “You might be surprised at how much work a teacher does over the summer; however, this goes beyond that.”

“This is because you’re also the Deputy Headmaster, isn’t it?” Ginny asked as she accepted her cup and saucer.

“Indeed, Miss Weasley.” She handed Hermione her tea before taking a sip from her own cup. “I have a problem that involves the two of you, and I’d like you to help me solve it. My problem is that it is time to pick the Head Girl for next year and you two are the final candidates.”

Hermione gave Ginny a look as if she was impressed that her friend had figured out the reason for the meeting. Ginny was amused at Hermione's reaction, but managed to keep her expression to a twitch of the corners of her mouth.

"Each of you would make an excellent choice, although for different reasons. Because you are both Gryffindors, the Headmaster has left the decision up to me as to which of you will be Head Girl and which will be the seventh year prefect. I'm afraid that I'm having a difficult time choosing as well. Therefore, I've decided to call you in and ask if each of you wants to be Head Girl, because if only one of you has the desire, then that will make things much easier."

Hermione quickly answered, "Yes, Professor. I've wanted to be Head Girl since my first year."

McGonagall nodded acknowledgement, as if she had expected that answer. She turned to Ginny.

"Will Harry be Head Boy?"

The barest of smiles graced McGonagall's lips. "Yes, the Headmaster and I have chosen him for that position. I gather that would provide incentive for you to want the Head Girl position as well?"

Ginny grinned. "That would be an added incentive for me to be Head Girl, so yes Professor, I would like to be Head Girl too."

McGonagall sighed. "Well, that did not help. Let's try a different approach. Miss Granger, will you please tell me why I should pick you."

"Of course, Professor," Hermione said smoothly. "I believe I would be a good Head Girl because I am at the top of my class academically, proving that I have good study practices and techniques. Therefore, I believe I can balance my academics with taking on the duties of Head Girl. I also believe I have a good relationship with all of the professors here. I'm also well known by the entire school, so people will know who to come to when they need help. I've also been a friend of Harry's since his first year here, and we've been Prefects together for

the last two years, so we have demonstrated that he and I can work well together.”

McGonagall nodded. “Those were many of my observations as well.” She turned to Ginny. “Miss Weasley, your turn.”

Ginny sat up just a little straighter. “Professor, I believe I can claim those same advantages, plus a little more. I’m also at the top of my class, just slightly behind Hermione, but by choice.”

An eyebrow made its way up towards McGonagall’s graying hair. “Please elaborate, Miss Weasley.”

“As you know, I was advanced a year shortly after I started.” McGonagall nodded. “I believe that shows I understand my studies here, and I could have gotten even better than the outstanding grades I did, but I chose not to.”

While McGonagall seemed very intrigued at her statement, Hermione turned to her with a penetrating stare that all but demanded an answer. “But why, Ginny? If you could have done better, why didn’t you do the best you could? Why did you let me think I was the best in our class?”

“Because I know that for you, being first in your class is one of your life’s goals and I did not want to prevent you from achieving that. It meant more to you than it did to me, so I purposefully held back because of our friendship. I merely needed to have grades that were almost as good as yours to be considered for Head Girl, believing that my other qualifications would probably win the position, as long as other considerations that I had no control over were not a major factor.”

Hermione looked completely shocked at the revelation.

“That is very commendable, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said with a nod. “Did you have anything else to recommend about yourself?”

“I do. I too am known by all of the professors and get along with them well, even Professor Snape,” she said with the barest of smiles,

which McGonagall matched. "I am well known by the entire school because of various things I've done, some of them individually, but mostly by virtue of working on teams, such as our Quidditch team; also, I encouraged Harry to start his Defense Study Group and helped him lead it. I have a good working relationship with each of the houses."

A glance showed Hermione wincing at that, as she had helped Harry lead the Defense Study group too, but had not mentioned it.

"Although I have not been a Prefect per se," Ginny continued, "I have acted in that capacity leadership-wise and people respond to me as if I were one. I've helped to encourage others in Gryffindor to do the right thing as I've helped Harry. I've also taken the time to help the younger students with their studies when they get stuck. Finally, besides having worked with Harry as an unofficial Prefect, I have, and will continue to have, a closer relationship to him than anyone else." Ginny could not help the grin as she said, "Just recently, Harry and my father signed a Familial Agreement."

This time, both of McGonagall's eyebrows went up. "One with all of the clauses?"

"Yes, Professor. Harry has mentioned that I will receive a very special birthday gift in a little over a week," Ginny said proudly. "I believe that if you need to choose between us for Head Girl based on abilities, experience, and relationships, I'm the better choice," Ginny replied, far more calmly than she felt. She wondered if she could create a portal between the seventh year girl's dorm room and Harry's room if Hermione was picked as Head Girl.

McGonagall leaned back in her chair and thought about it.

Ginny looked over at Hermione and her friend looked very concerned. She was also fidgeting and glancing at Ginny. She suspected that Hermione was thinking very hard about the deal she had offered her earlier.

"For several reasons," McGonagall said very slowly, "I wish I could make both of you Head Girl, but that is not possible." She reached

into a side drawer and pulled out a silver badge and a gold badge, then looked at each of them carefully.

"Professor?" Hermione nervously asked. "What does the rest of the staff say?"

She looked like she did not want to say it, but McGonagall answered, "Overall, they are evenly split." After another few seconds of thought, the Deputy Headmaster put the two badges on her desk with her hands covering them and slid them over, one in front of each girl. When she raised her hands, the gold one with "HG" was in front of Ginny and the silver one with a "P" was in front of Hermione.

Hermione looked crushed and Ginny felt for her, despite her elation.

"Thank you for your vote of confidence, Professor," Ginny softly said, "but may I please ask Hermione one question before either of us pick up a badge?"

McGonagall looked very curious. "If you wish..."

"No, Ginny," Hermione quickly said, her eyes filled with unshed tears. "I'll always know what should have been and it wouldn't be the same. And you are right, you are a better leader than I am -- even the Slytherins respect you." She reached out and grabbed the silver badge before turning to Ginny. Leaning over, since the chairs were close enough, she hugged her friend. "Congratulations. Please promise me one thing, though."

"It's yours if I can," Ginny told her as she returned the hug.

"Don't hold back. Do your best and push me -- push us all," she whispered with much emotion, causing her voice to crack on the last word.

Ginny smiled. Hermione was still her friend. "I will for you."

Hermione pulled back and nodded. Turning to McGonagall, she asked, "Is there anything else, Professor?"

“No, you’ve been most helpful, as usual.” With a kind smile, their professor said, “Since you are here and I know how well you treat our library, if you would like, you may visit and pick out three books to take home with you and read, as long as you return them on the second of September. I’ll speak with Madam Pince so she knows I gave you permission.”

Hermione sniffled as a tear finally spilled onto her cheek. “Thank you, Professor. I’ll see you on the first.” She quickly got up and hurried out of the office.

As if choreographed, both Ginny and McGonagall sagged back into their chairs as they let the emotion and stress of the moment bleed away in a welcome silence.

After several deep breaths, McGonagall sat back up and looked at Ginny. “Congratulations, Miss Weasley. I’m also heartened that this did not destroy a friendship.”

“I am too; I am very glad,” she said fervently.

McGonagall pursed her lips as if working up her courage. “If I may, what were you going to ask Miss Granger at the end?”

Ginny found it very hard to lie at the moment. “I was going to ask how badly she wanted it and if I should offer to withdraw my desire for the position ... no strings attached.” She had felt badly enough for her friend after the badges had been revealed that she would not have held her to the offered deal.

“I’m impressed, Miss Weasley.” McGonagall slowly gave her a real smile. “I believe I have made the right decision.”

Ginny found it hard to be happy at the moment, her friend’s loss still weighing on her. “I hope so.”

A slender book was placed on the desk next to the golden badge. “Please take this as well and read it before the first of September. I’ll expect you and Mr Potter to be on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ at half past ten to help new students and parents as needed. The password to the

Headmaster's office at the beginning of the year will be 'Ginger Snap', and you can tell Mr Potter that the password on the door to the Head suite will be 'Two from Gryffindor' and you may change it when you wish. Unless you have any questions, I hope the rest of your summer is pleasant."

She reached out and picked up the badge and the slender book, which Ginny saw was titled Policies and Procedures for the Head Boy and Head Girl. "Thank you, Professor," she said.

"Miss Weasley, if you would like to hand a few your Head Girl duties to Miss Granger, assuming she is agreeable, I don't believe anyone on staff would mind." McGonagall's smile was still firmly in place.

That made Ginny smile too. "I'll be sure to discuss it with her." After a few seconds of wondering, Ginny decided to ask her burning question. "Professor? If I may ask, why did you choose me?"

Professor McGonagall looked at her for a moment, her stern look slipping back into place. "This will stay between us, Miss Weasley." Ginny nodded. "I believe your leadership qualities are slightly better and you are more of a well rounded individual. By that, I mean that you would have a better chance of being in any of the four houses."

Ginny nodded.

"Also, while the staff is evenly split overall on which of you to pick, when I asked the other three Head of Houses, all three thought you would make the better Head Girl," McGonagall explained.

"Thank you for answering my question," Ginny said humbly as she rose from her chair. She started to leave and made it as far as the door when McGonagall called out one last time.

"And Miss Weasley," the softer look returned to the older woman. "Once you have a ring on your finger, please make an appointment with me for some Sunday afternoon and bring your intended along. I have a few stories the two of you might like to hear."

Ginny's heavy emotions started to lift as she thought about Harry and their relationship. She gave a heartfelt smile. "Thank you, Professor. We'll take you up on that offer. While I expect to enjoy them, I'm sure they will be particularly special for Harry. I hope you have a pleasant summer too." She left the office.

She could not believe Harry had withheld the information that he was Head Boy from her. She would need to do something about that. Maybe a prank that made all of his clothes except for his boxers disappear as he walked in the back door of The Burrow in front of her family. If she was lucky and the twins were there, they might even get the blame, she thought with amusement.

First, she headed for the library. She wanted to make sure Hermione was all right. After that, she would track down Harry and tell him her good news.

Ginny took the Floo to Sirius's house, to start her journey to Hogwarts for her last year there. As she came out, she was swept into an embrace and kissed for all she was worth. She took a moment to get her breath back before saying teasingly, "Mr Potter, I hope I'm the only one you greet like that."

Harry laughed. "I'd be an idiot to do that with anyone else, especially if you ever caught me," he joked.

"You've got that right," she replied with a grin. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes. I've already told Sirius and Hestia good-bye, so we can leave now." He started walking her to the Apparation spot outside the front door.

"How's Hestia doing?" Ginny asked with concern.

Harry shrugged. "She looks the same to me and complains the same." He grinned at her as he whispered, "Honestly, I'm ready to leave for her last month. She's been really vocal about her problems the last few days."

Ginny swatted him on the shoulder as they neared the front door. "You'd be complaining too if you were eight months pregnant." Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Is this how you're going to be treating me one day?"

To his credit, she saw him instantly figured out what she was asking. "No, not at all." He smoothly added, "It will be easy with you because you will be the one I'm taking care of."

She grinned to match his. "Good answer."

He took her outside, shut and locked the door behind them, and then at the Apparation point, he took her hand tightly and took them both to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. The old man who watched the Portal to the Muggle portion and the Apparation point bade them to hurriedly move along so whoever came next would not land on top of them. They moved to a spot about half way between the Portal and the train. There were a few older students already there and they waved to them.

A few minutes later, the first lost-looking student came through the Portal from the Muggle side. As he looked around with wide eyes at the train and the Platform, Harry waved him over.

"Hi, I'm Harry. Is this your first year at Hogwarts?"

"Yes," he said timidly.

Harry knelt down and flashed a friendly smile. "Well, you're in the right place. Just pull your trunk over and get on the train. You can sit in any compartment except for the ones in the first passenger car; those are reserved. I'm sure other first-years will be joining you soon."

"OK, thanks." The boy struggled to pull his trunk along, so Harry quickly pulled out his wand and shot a Featherweight charm at the trunk. The boy stopped and looked in surprise as his trunk suddenly became a lot easier to carry.

"Magic is really useful at times. That will last all day."

“Thanks, Harry!” The boy walked almost normally now as he headed towards the train.

“That was well done, Harry.”

Ginny had been concentrating on the exchange, so she had not seen their friend walk up.

“Hi Hermione.” Harry gave her a hug.

After Harry, she came over and gave Ginny a hug too. “Hi Ginny.”

“Hi Hermione.”

“I know just the spell to help you out.” Pulling out her wand, the Gryffindor Prefect cast a spell. When she was done, flaming letters spelling “Information” were several feet above their heads.

Ginny chuckled, as did Harry. “Thanks, I think,” he said wryly.

“I forgot to ask the other day, but how are your parents doing? Are they having concerns about not seeing you much after you finish here?” Ginny asked.

“Yes, we’ve had several talks about that recently. I’ve done my best to assure them that now that I have my Apparation license, I can come see them as often as I’d like, but I’m not sure they believe me.”

“I suppose they’re concerned that you’ll just get so busy that you won’t have time, not that you’ll avoid them on purpose.” Ginny tried to comfort her friend.

“You have a point,” Hermione agreed. “I told them that I want to get a degree from a Muggle university too, so they should see me often enough. That seemed to make them feel a little better.”

“I’m sure you’ll work it out. You always do find solutions to the really hard problems,” Ginny assured her.

“Thanks. So I don’t run out of time, I’ll go make sure everything is ready for the Prefect meeting,” Hermione offered.

“Thanks!” Ginny exclaimed. She was thrilled that Hermione was not only still her best female friend, but that she had wanted to do some of the Head Girl tasks. They had had a long talk the week after the positions had been awarded and Hermione had admitted to Ginny that after she had cooled down and thought about it, she really did agree with McGonagall that Ginny was the better choice, even if that hurt.

As Ginny turned around, she saw several first-year girls coming their way. She should not have been surprised, but they all stopped in front of Harry. From the looks in their eyes, she could tell they were crushing on him; it was so cute.

While Harry was busy, she heard her name being shouted and looked up to see Lavender and Parvati running towards her.

“Let me see! Let me see!” Lavender was shouting. Parvati looked just as eager.

Ginny saw Harry glance up at her and shake his head slightly. It was obvious he saw it all as silliness. She just held out her left hand.

Parvati grabbed her hand and looked with anticipation. “It’s wonderful. Big enough to make a statement, but not too big. It looks flawless.”

“It is. It’s also a Potter heirloom,” Ginny told them of the engagement ring on her left hand. She was even more pleased that it was the same ring she had received in the other timeline. She had no idea why Harry had picked this ring both times, but the sentimental value had reduced her to tears and she had had a hard time pulling herself together to explain that to Harry. When he had learned, he had been most pleased.

“So, how did he propose?” Lavender asked eagerly.

Ginny smiled as she remembered. “We were having a party at my house for my sixteenth birthday. Right in the middle of the party in the

evening, he came up behind me, put his arms around me, a spell hit us, and then he Apparated us away.”

The two girls gasped and looked very surprised. “What happened?” they asked at the same time.

“We reappeared in the middle of Stonehenge just as sun was setting.” The girls ooh’d. Ginny also noticed Tracey Davis and Daphne Greengrass had walked up and they were listening intently too.

“He told me not to worry, that my father had cast a Muggle-repelling charm on us. He then lifted me up on the what was left of the center alter stone and told me that true love had brought us together, while he pulled the ring out of his pocket. Then he asked me to marry him.” Ginny sighed along with the other girls. “I wish I could say that I did something wonderful like leaping into his arms and kissing him, but I was so overwhelmed I sort of melted and cried with happiness.”

“It’s OK,” Parvati told her and gave her a hug, which the others joined for a big group hug.

Ginny took a deep breath to clear the emotion and gave a small grin. “At least I was able to stick my hand out so he would know I accepted and he could put the ring on.” The girls all laughed. She looked over and saw Harry chuckling and shaking his head at her.

“You’re the first to get engaged, and you’re Head Girl engaged to the Head Boy with a set of rooms all to yourselves,” Lavender said with a big smile implying a lot.

“Sorry, girls,” Ginny said with an almost evil smile. “No details for you there. We’ll abide by the rules. That’s the official story and we’re sticking to it.”

There were a many chuckles as Daphne drawled, “Right.”

“Hey Ginny, could you give me a little help here?” Harry called.

She looked over and saw a small crowd around Harry. "Why don't you go get on the train? I need to help Harry." The four girls bade her good-bye for the moment. She took a few steps towards Harry and, to her surprise, several of the boys came to her with adoring faces. Suddenly, she knew what Harry felt like with the first-year girls.

Harry and Ginny wearily entered their rooms for the first time that evening. The Prefect meeting had gone well, as had the train ride and the Welcoming Feast. All of their duties had just added up and it was late. They looked around at where they had found themselves.

There were four Portal doors to take them to the place near each of the common rooms, as well as the door they had just used, which was near the Great Hall. Besides the main room, which looked very comfortable with two work tables, two couches, two chairs, and a nice fireplace; there were three other doors. The one in the middle was to their bathroom, which looked like a smaller version of the big Prefect bathroom. The other two doors went to each of their bedrooms.

To keep up appearances, they each went to their own room and pulled their trunks out of their pockets and expanded them before they quickly unpacked. Ginny also used the toilet that was in her room -- each bedroom having its own water closet. She changed into a nice pair of blue silk pyjamas and then padded into Harry's bedroom. He was just crawling into his bed, wearing only his pyjama bottoms.

When he saw her, he grinned and held up the top sheet. She grinned back and hurried over, crawling in with him and then snuggling up to him as he turned off the lights with a quick wave of his wand.

She craned her neck up and briefly kissed him. "I love you, Harry." She snuggled into his side as she laid her head on his shoulder and put her arm over his stomach.

"I love you too, Ginny."

She lightly squeezed his body. "Can we do this every night? I can't think of a better way to go to sleep." She felt his chest and stomach bounce a little as he silently chuckled.

"I can," he said confidently, "but we said we wouldn't do that until next August. Are you sure we shouldn't get married before then?"

Ginny giggled lightly. "That would be nice, but Mum would have a cow if we got married before I was seventeen."

His arms went around her and he was silent for a moment. "I wonder if I could get Sirius to talk her into it?"

She started laughing. "I'd like to see him try." Harry joined her.

"It would be a good show," he agreed.

Ginny squeezed him again. "Be patient, Harry. I'll make it worth your wait."

He kissed the top of her head. "I'm sure you will. I also know there are a few other things we can do until then."

Ginny groaned. "You are going to make this so hard on us if you're not careful. I'm really trying to be good."

"Sorry," he said, sounding very contrite. He tightened his hold on her.

She kissed his chest where her mouth was and relaxed. She could wait. There were no stupid destinies hanging over either of their heads. All was as it should be.

Ginny was hand in hand with Harry as they walked to the Headmaster's office. She had a good idea what was about to happen and wondered if she was right. "I think it would be best if you made the offer," she whispered to him.

He looked at her as they continued down the corridor. It was obvious he was trying to think of all of the possible outcomes. She was not

sure why he was thinking so hard; they had discussed this situation multiple times.

Harry sighed. "I'd prefer it didn't happen at all, but I agree. If it must be done, I should be the one to do it."

She squeezed his hand in a show of support. "Have you heard any more news about Draco, other than he came to visit his mother?"

He chuckled. "Sorry, but I forgot to tell you. Sirius said that Draco was not well received during the visits he had with various people here in England last week, so he's decided to live on the continent. Other than the occasional visit to see his mother, he won't be returning to England.

"That's a relief," Ginny sighed, glad that the prat could generally be ignored. Sirius had already told them, with much glee, that Draco was a very changed person. Narcissa had said that even at the end of Draco's seventh year, he was not a leader in the school, much to the boy's frustration.

Arriving at the Headmaster's office, she told the gargoyle, "Walkers Shortbread". It moved aside and they went up the stairs.

"Just think," he mused, "no more having to remember all of these sweets and desserts soon."

Ginny snorted. "Thank Merlin. I swear I get fat just thinking about it all."

Now he snorted as he raised an eyebrow while looking at her. "You, fat? Hardly."

She gave him a questioning look, easily containing her tease. "Hardly? So while I'm normally not fat, I am fat sometimes?"

He leaned over and kissed her temple as he whispered, "Only in the right places." Further conversation was prevented by him knocking and an "Enter" being quickly said from the other side of the door. They entered the room.

"Mr Potter, please come in. Miss Weasley, I did not expect you, but you may join us too," the Headmaster cordially said, as if he really had not minded that Harry had brought Ginny along when the Headmaster had invited only Harry.

"Thank you, sir. I'm glad you don't mind Ginny being here. I could not think of anything you might tell me that would be a problem for her to hear, especially as we will be married in less than two months." Harry had been very polite, as he had been all year. Ginny knew Harry still respected Dumbledore, but she thought he still had not totally forgiven the old man for putting him with the Dursleys and for failing to ensure that Sirius had had a trial when the man had been first captured.

"That is an excellent point." Dumbledore gave his famous grandfatherly smile. "While we have met a number of times this year for official duties, we have spent very little time together getting to know one another, not only this year, but through most of your years."

"Isn't that as it should be, Professor? I believe most students never see the inside of your office unless they are in trouble beyond the capacity of their Head of House."

Ginny felt Harry casually grab her hand and hold it. Even though he was calm on the outside, she could tell that on the inside, he was not.

Dumbledore chuckled. "Quite true, Mr Potter."

Ginny mentally congratulated Harry for his accomplishment. He had worked for several years to get the Headmaster to call him Mr Potter instead of Harry. He had finally done it at their first staff meeting of this year when he all but shamed Dumbledore in front of the entire staff by asking, "Why am I the only student you call by first name, even when I've asked you not to?"

"Nevertheless, as you've finished your NEWTs and you'll be finished with Hogwarts in a few days, I thought we should discuss a few things."

“Oh? What’s so important to discuss? About all that’s left is the train ride home, and we did not discuss the train ride here before it happened,” Harry said.

Much like Hermione, Harry could wield logic when he wanted to, and Ginny was enjoying it.

Dumbledore’s smile disappeared, from his eyes as well as his mouth. “I’m afraid this is of a more personal nature. You see, there was a prophecy made about you shortly before you were born...”

“That is what you’ve been holding out on me, isn’t it?” Harry hotly asked, his anger rising quickly. “You waited six years since I first asked you at the end of my first year to tell me that I’m the one destined to kill Tom Riddle, haven’t you?”

The Headmaster looked slightly startled at the mention of Riddle’s name and started to answer, but Harry did not stop. He quoted:

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...
Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...

And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...

And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives.”

(Quoted from OotP by JKR)

Dumbledore looked shocked.

“Is there anything else you’ve withheld from me, Professor?” Harry fixed him with a stare.

Ginny could feel Harry’s power as she held his hand. In fact, as she looked at him, she realized he was starting to glow slightly again. She squeezed his hand to get his attention and to calm him down, but he either ignored her or did not feel it.

“How did you know?” Dumbledore hoarsely whispered.

"It doesn't matter, unless," Harry dramatically paused, "you're willing to make an Unbreakable Vow to tell me everything you've withheld from me and to never communicate what I explain to you to anyone else -- ever."

Dumbledore sat there stunned for a moment. As if he suddenly realized there was someone else in the room, he slowly turned to Ginny. "Miss Weasley, I have found much mystery about you and suspect you are involved as well. Would you tell me what is going on?"

Wishing she could make her eyes twinkle but knowing she could not, Ginny settled for an innocent smile. "I'm sorry, Professor, but anything I might say would need to be covered under Harry's offer."

The old man shook his head slowly. "I'm so disappointed in both of you."

Harry laughed. "As was said in the Muggle movie Hermione showed me last summer, you'll need to get used to disappointment."

Dumbledore did not look pleased.

"The bottom line is that as the one who was forced to and did end Riddle's miserable existence, I can tell you he's already dead. You already have multiple proofs. It's time to give up your obsession with Voldemort and let me lead my own life," Harry demanded.

"Is that what you really think, Mr Potter?"

"What else could it be, Professor, but that you want to decide how I must live." Harry had lost some of his anger and all of his glow, but none of his intensity. "You forced me to live with people who hated me, and you kept trying to send me back. You even told me you knew you were condemning me to ten hard and dark years. You let Sirius go to prison so he could not take care of me. You allowed Voldemort into this castle as a teacher in what looks suspiciously like a test for me, as I can think of no other reason to endanger a school full of children with a magical artifact that you knew Voldemort would covet. And I know things would have been worse as the years went by if

Sirius had not been rescued and many known Death Eaters who were not in prison had not been rounded up about five years ago -- something you should have taken care of despite what Fudge wanted at the time. The only way I can explain all of that is that you had your plan for how everything should be, regardless of what anyone else wanted. I am alive and happy today because some people you could not control loved me enough to help me destroy Voldemort."

Dumbledore seemed to age in front of them as Harry ranted. Ginny was sure she had never seen him look so old, so ... defeated.

"Could you not accept that I loved you too, Harry? That I wanted you to enjoy your childhood and so I tried to shield you from as much ugliness of life as possible?" Dumbledore asked, almost pleading in his grandfatherly way.

Harry gave a sharp shake of his head. "I can accept that you believe that, but not that it's true. If you had really cared for me, you never would have left me at the Dursleys or you would have at least checked on me at frequent intervals to see what really happened there. I may respect your knowledge, but I do not adore you as so many others do."

The Headmaster looked lost in thought as he looked at the young man. Ginny wondered what he would do.

"I'm afraid I can not take your offer, Mr Potter," he said with a sigh. "I find Unbreakable Vows to not be a good action, except under the most dire of circumstances, which this is not. However, I will implore you once again to explain to me what happened."

"And I refuse without a Vow, as it is not your personal concern," Harry said stubbornly, his determination clearly visible.

Dumbledore did not refute Harry's statement and Ginny found that interesting. Instead, he again contemplated Harry for a moment.

"Will you at least tell me your proofs for the prophecy being fulfilled?"

"I don't see why not," Harry said magnanimously. "You've heard all of this before."

Dumbledore looked slightly surprised.

"There are three reasons. First, because those who had a Dark Mark no longer do, indicating that the caster is dead. Second, because Professor Lupin still has his present job, five years after he started, indicating that the person who cast the curse on the Defense Against the Dark Arts position is dead. And thirdly," Harry grinned for the first time in the meeting, "because I, the fulfiller of the prophecy, said so and you should trust me because I have your and everyone else's best interests in mind -- all for the greater good, you understand."

Ginny thought Dumbledore did not like that last part, based on his sour expression, but she understood why Harry had said it. She admitted to herself that there was something very satisfying about throwing Dumbledore's words back at him. A small part of her was petty enough to want to tell him of his failure in the other timeline, but it was probably for the best that her time-traveling secret was kept to Sirius, Harry, and herself.

Dumbledore said nothing for a long moment, so Harry said, "If there is no other pressing business, I hope you'll excuse us, Professor. I believe I need a breath of fresh air before dinner." When Dumbledore still said nothing, Harry stood and helped her up with the hand he was still holding.

Just before they made it to the door, a beautiful trill filled the air for a few seconds. With a deep breath and a relaxed smile, Harry walked them over to the bird. "Hello again, Fawkes, or maybe it's good-bye. I did enjoy seeing you this year." As Harry held out his hand the bird let him softly stroke the side of his head. Ginny also reached out and stroked the bird, although she did not say anything.

When Ginny pulled her hand back from the phoenix, Harry led them out of the Headmaster's office. Ginny took one last look back and saw a very troubled-looking old man. She wondered if he would accept that Tom Riddle was dead now.

Down in the corridor, Ginny looked at Harry and saw that he looked a little tense again, now that they were away from Fawkes. "Did it feel good to get all of that out of your system?"

Harry chuckled at first, before he started to give an all out laugh, one that seemed a little maniacal at the end. "What in the hell did I just do? Damn! That felt good to get that off of my chest. Please help me to never get that angry again, but yes, it felt really good."

She gave him a wry smile. "I'm glad you understand that should only be a one-time thing. Perhaps he'll now believe that Voldemort is dead, and I think he needed to understand how he made several bad decisions after your parents were killed, but you can't keep the hate in you. It will eventually hurt you, too."

"I know," he acknowledged as they made their way for the front door. "I think I can let it go now. I've already started in some ways. In fact, I really don't hate him all that much. I think I mostly pity him, as he will need to live with knowing what he did to me."

"That's a start, Harry," she told him as she squeezed his hand. "Now, why don't go find our favorite tree by the lake, sit under it, and just relax."

He wetted his lips slightly, as if in anticipation. "I like that idea," he said mischievously. "How about I also nuzzle and kiss your neck, right where you like it most?"

Ginny closed her eyes and shivered slightly as memories of previous times came to her. Then she opened her eyes and said, "I agree," as she started walking faster, pulling him along. Harry laughed and she enjoyed his happiness.

Ginny was very nervous as she Apparated to the entrance hall of their castle. Their home still amused her, even after five years of marriage and living here. Harry had wanted to live in a castle, so he had bought one. It was not very large as far as castles went, but it was theirs.

As she passed the cloak closet, she handed her broom case to the suit of armor next to the closet. It acted as it was charmed to do, taking the case and holding it. It also snapped off a salute to her. She snorted at the antics of the armor, wondering who had charmed it to do that. The problem was she had too many choices between her brothers, Sirius, Remus, and her husband. Based on the armor's action, she would bet it was either her husband or Remus. One of the others would have made the gesture rather less acceptable in polite society.

At the sound of the armor clanking slightly, she saw Harry poke his head out of a doorway down the corridor.

"Ginny? What are you doing home so early? Didn't you have practice until six?"

She smiled at him as she made her way to him. "I did, but I was allowed to leave early." She greeted him with a kiss and kept her arms around his neck.

Harry's eyes narrowed and his head tilted slightly; he looked at her with a critical eye. "Is something wrong, dear?"

Ginny almost laughed. He missed very little. "No," she told him with only a hint of mirth escaping her.

He looked at her even more carefully. "Then why are you home early?"

"Can't I come home to see my wonderful husband?" she playfully asked.

"The Harpies never let you go early unless you're injured. Did you hurt yourself on some new Chaser play?" He was starting to look very concerned.

Ginny took pity on him and started to come to the point. "No, but you are correct that I was sent home for medical reasons."

His hands immediately went to her shoulders, pushing her back to his arm's length, and he examined her very carefully -- even turning her around to check her back side.

As she turned back to face him, she laughed, which angered him slightly, based on his expression. "Harry. What you're looking for isn't on the outside, it's on the inside."

"What? Did they find a growth or something in you?" He had not panicked yet, but it looked like he was heading that way.

"Sort of." As his look of panic continued to grow, she hurried into her explanation. "Do you remember a couple of weeks ago when I told you that I was a week late in taking my contraception potion?"

"Yes..." he guardedly drawled.

"Well, because of that oversight, you will have an heir in a little over eight months," she told him with her biggest grin.

Harry stood there in shock for several seconds before he whooped and stepped forward, grabbing her around the waist and twirling her around. When he set her back down on the ground, he kissed her so soundly Ginny felt weak in the knees.

"Wow! You can do that again," she exclaimed, and Harry proceeded to do just that. She felt star-struck and barely noticed him sweeping her off of her feet until he was striding down the corridor, one arm under her back and the other arm under her bent knees.

He walked into the sitting room and let himself fall back onto an overstuffed couch, still holding her. He still had a goofy grin from the good news. "So, I assume you had a team physical today?"

"Yes," she said as she nodded too. "It was time for the monthly check. Since we're all women on the Harpies, they do it like clockwork to make sure surprises don't happen and we are able to continue to play."

"So, do you know what we'll get?" he excitedly asked.

“Yes,” she said and teasingly said no more.

After a few seconds of her looking like the cat that got the canary, his hands moved extraordinarily fast and she was being tickled. No matter how she tried to squirm, she could not get away. “OK, I give! I give!”

“And?” he asked after stopping the tickling, although his hands were still in place.

Breathily, as she was still recovering, she said, “Sirius will be pleased that your firstborn will be a son.” He again kissed her soundly and she was glad she was not still standing.

“I’m so glad,” he told her. “I know you said you weren’t ready for children yet, but I think you’ll be a wonderful mother for him.”

She laid her head on his shoulder and enjoyed feeling him hold her tightly. “It’s not that I don’t want to be a mother, I was just having so much fun playing professional Quidditch that I didn’t want to stop this soon.” She sighed. “But I guess those days are over now and it’s time for the next phase of my life.”

“Hey, don’t sound so glum,” he said consolingly. “When we finished Hogwarts, you said you only wanted to play for seven or eight years, so you’re not that far off. Also, when the kids are grown, you can go back and be a coach or something. Oh, and in a few years, we can teach them how to fly and play,” he said enthusiastically. “So you don’t need to give up the sport forever. Besides, I still have the box seats so you can see every Holyhead Harpy game for as long as you want.”

Ginny stretched up and briefly kissed him, appreciating his support. “You’re right, I had planned to stop in a couple of years anyway.”

“And you’ll be a wonderful mother too. It’s not like you need to work, or me either for that matter.”

She shrugged. "I suppose not, not with the Potter fortune, but I don't like relying on it."

"I know what you mean. I'd prefer to take care of us myself," he admitted.

"Speaking of working... How was your day?" She watched his face with her head still on his shoulder.

"It was fine," he told her matter-of-factly.

Ginny sighed deeply and he looked down at her with an amused smile.

"You know I'm not supposed to talk about what I do at the Department of Mysteries. So which answer do you want? Fine? Interesting? All right? Challenging? Or long?" He finished the list with a grin.

She closed her eyes and slowly shook her head, although a wry smile was trying to get out. Harry, true to his promise at work, almost never talked about what he did on the job. There had only been one exception in five years, and that had come about a year ago. She thought back to that time.

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They had been sitting in their living room in front of the fire late on a Friday night. Harry had been reading some old book whose cover looked vaguely familiar, while she had been looking over her Quidditch playbook, trying to find a better defense against the Spear Formation. Out of the blue, Harry had asked her, "Since the time-travel spell you used requires a pint of fresh blood for every year you desire to come back, and it must be from the same person, whose did you use?"

That statement had caused her to freeze, both physically and mentally. After a long moment, she slowly looked up to find his green eyes ablaze with curiosity as he stared at her.

"I found this book at work today that describes a ritual that sounds like exactly what you told me you used when you came back in time. I can see why you used it, as it is extremely accurate, as long as you create the mixture correctly. You had once told me that you had help, which is obvious as there is no way you could have sacrificed that much of your own blood and still completed the ritual. So who helped you?" He was completely calm, but also completely focused on her for the answer.

She was not sure she wanted to answer him, but his look demanded it. "You, uh, you found that book at work?"

He nodded, but he did not let her look away.

After an uncomfortable moment, she finally said, "Hermione. She was the only other person on our side left, and she was a quadriplegic. I convinced her to check my equations and be the sacrifice, since I was the only one physically capable of doing the ritual." She was not sure why she had never wanted to share that, but it had not seemed right.

Harry looked at her for a moment longer before he quietly said, "Thank you for telling me that."

"Why?" she asked just as quietly.

He smiled his knowing little smile. "For some reason, I've always felt it was Hermione, but I wanted to know for sure. Then when I found this book today, my curiosity was piqued again. I wondered again when I saw her doing an experiment, just before I was leaving for home. You know how she can get, how focused she can be when pursuing research."

Ginny had nodded and smiled. It was one of their friend's obvious traits.

"Somehow, I knew I owed her. Even though I didn't need to, I stay a few extra minutes to watch what she was doing." Harry shook his head slightly and grimaced. "I'm glad I did because there was an

undetected curse in an object she was working on and she was surprised and unable to contain it.”

Ginny gasped.

“Fortunately, my magic was strong enough to contain it and she was able to escape unharmed,” Harry said with a finality, ending his story there.

“Stefan will be pleased,” Ginny commented, glad her friend was all right, and wondering how many dangerous things her husband worked with that she never knew about.

“If she tells him, and you may not,” he told her sternly. “Not him or her.”

She nodded meekly. Ginny knew of his promise to keep the secrets he encountered on the job. She wondered how this was exempt. Then she realized she already knew of the ritual he had asked about, so nothing new there; and she only knew that Hermione had been working on a cursed object, no surprise there. It’s one of the things everyone knew the Department of Mysteries did; they researched things, many of which were old objects and most of those were cursed.

Harry had been recruited to work there because of his power level, and therefore his ability to be able to overcome problems with brute force, if need be. He had accepted the offer because it had sounded interesting and it kept him out of the public eye.

Ginny thought of Stefan and wondered what he thought about Hermione’s job. She wondered if he sometimes disliked the shroud of mystery surrounding his wife’s work. He was a nice Muggle-born Wizard that she and Harry had managed to get to know a little over the four years Hermione had been dating him. Because she had met him at Oxford, after she had left Hogwarts and he had left Durmstrang (he had been a friend of Viktor Krum’s), Ginny and Harry had not been able to spend much time with Hermione and Stefan until recently. A few months ago, the two had graduated from Oxford and gotten married. That was when Hermione had also started

working at the Department of Mysteries with Harry, who had started working there immediately after he had left Hogwarts.

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"Back to the important subject," Ginny said, trying to get her mind out of the memory and off of Harry's work. "What do you think we should name him?"

Harry looked across the room, staring at nothing in particular. After a few seconds, he said, "I think I'd like to use my dad's name, but probably as the middle name." He looked down at her, obviously still thinking hard, which caused him to talk slowly. "What about Edward James?"

She considered it. "I think I'd prefer something else, as that would get shortened to Ed or Eddie, and I've never cared for those. How about Tristan? I saw that on your family tree."

"Tristan James Potter," Harry said as if tasting it. "It will be pretty hard to shorten," he pointed out.

"Some might try with Tris."

He snorted. "I doubt it, it has no ring to it." A grin came over him and he craned his neck and kissed her soundly again. "I like it. Tristan James Potter. I can hardly wait to tell Sirius and Remus."

"Can you imagine what my mother will say?" she said with a chuckle.

Harry laughed. "I better put a deafening spell on us, not to mention a shield to protect our ribs."

"She's not that bad," Ginny said through a light laugh.

"Perhaps not, but you'll have to admit that she will be very enthusiastic in her rejoicing," he said with an easy grin. "I've heard the story many times from Bill about when he told his mother that he and Fleur were expecting."

"True," she agreed before she got a mischievous smile. "Speaking of enthusiasm, how about if you take me up to our tower and remind me how I got pregnant? I want a reminder of how much you love me."

Harry laughed again. "I'll happily satisfy that urge any time you have it, Ginny." He momentarily set her down on the couch, stood up, and then picked her up again, causing her to squeal in delight. As he started walking towards their bedroom, he sincerely told her, "Thank you again for everything you've done for me, Ginny -- in both timelines. I love you so much."

Ginny looked at him as he carried her. "I love you too, Harry, and I always will -- no matter how many times I have to travel through time."

(the end)

((A/N: When I started this story, I had one goal in mind: a redo fic with only Ginny going back, not Harry. Along the way, I came up with three other things to accomplish with the story: while Harry is always a "main character" in an HP story he is not the focus of the story (Ginny is); the story is told only by females, never by Harry or any other male; and a semi-believable redeemed Snape. I hope everyone who has made it this far has enjoyed this story.

I want to give a big thanks to Wolfs_Scream! Despite the fact that my name is listed the author, Wolfs_Scream played a very important role in making this story read much better by being my editor. He pointed out mistakes (in grammar and in plot) as well as encouraged me with comments to make the story better. He's a (mostly) hidden hero and I deeply appreciate his help.

I also appreciate those who have left reviews, especially the long, meaningful, and/or funny reviews, whether positive or negative. While I enjoy writing just for the fun of it, well thought out reviews make writing more enjoyable.

To those who have been wondering, I finally found where my muse for Lily's Child went and I've convinced her to come back home. :-)

Work will be restarting on that very soon. Other short stories might also pop out ... one never knows. -- Kevin))